

“Sustainability”

The Slippery Watchword of the Worldwatch Institute

By Kevin Mooney

Summary: *Twenty years ago a UN conference in Rio de Janeiro issued a call for worldwide action against global warming. U.S. environmental groups enthusiastically made it their cause. But now the global warming agenda is on hold, and environmentalists have gone back to the drawing board. Green groups are repackaging their old anti-energy and population control agenda under a new name. Their watchword: “Sustainability.”*

- “Ladies, put on your ‘No Entry’ signs!!!”



“Sustainability” long been eco-code for “planet over people”

That’s what the Roman Empress tells the vestal virgins in the Mel Brooks film comedy *History of the World, Part 1*. And it may as well be the message Robert Engelman, president of the Worldwatch Institute, conveys to women when he advises them to help the earth remain “sustainable.” Engelman and other green activists are serious. They think a growing world population is jeopardizing everyone’s health, decreasing their economic opportunities, and hurting the environment. Engelman advice: the best way for women to correct these dire conditions and promote global “sustainability” is to avoid reproducing.

The idea that life on earth can be sustained by limiting the growth of the world’s population has been around for a long time. “The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man,” wrote Thomas Malthus in his famous 1798 treatise *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Malthus argued that population growth was harmful to the earth and a threat to human populations. His view continues to resonate today among the academics and political figures who are well-positioned to influence national and international public policies.

In 1968 the American biologist Paul Ehrlich wrote *The Population Bomb*, a book that opens with this blunt proclamation:

“The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s, hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any

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crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate...

Ehrlich's doomsday scenario of an exploding world population predicted environmental catastrophe. He went on to found Zero Population Growth (ZPG), whose name described what was needed to prevent disaster. In 2002, perhaps because Ehrlich's predictions were so spectacularly wrong, ZPG changed its name to Population Connection. The organization, based in Washington D.C., today claims 140,000 members. For the folks at Population Connection even a slight uptick in pregnancy rates is lamentable:

"The global population has doubled from 3.5 billion, when ZPG was founded, to 7 billion today. Population growth rates have fallen around the world because of the success of voluntary family planning programs. But the global fertility rate is 2.5--still higher than the "replacement level" of 2.1 children per woman. At this rate, the world's population will grow to 11 billion by 2050 and nearly 27 billion by 2100! "

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But Population Connection finds cause for hope when it notes that demographers anticipate that worldwide fertility rates will decline as long as "investments" are made in "family planning education and services." Population Connection sees a possibility that "the population could peak at 8 billion in 2050 and begin to shrink thereafter. In fact, if this low-fertility projection comes true, the population in 2100 would be 6.2 billion--the same size that it was in the year 2000."

What will save the planet? In its mission statement, Population Connection declares that it "works to ensure that every woman around the world who wants to delay or end her childbearing has access to the health services and contraceptive supplies she needs in order to do so. Typically, when woman have access to affordable birth control, they have fewer children, regardless of income or educational levels." The answer: increased government control over reproduction. Despite all the talk about "investments" and "access to services," that's what the Population Connection solution comes down to.

Obama: "More Than One Way To Skin A Cat"

For the sake of "sustainability," UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and environmental activists always demand government regulations and controls. As Chris Horner, a senior fellow with the Competitive Enterprise Institute, has astutely observed, "The issue is never the issue." The marketing and the message change, but the endgame remains the same: government must intervene so life can be sustained.

U.S. green groups and their transnational allies around the world constantly invoke "sustainability" and "sustainable development," notes Bonner Cohen, a senior fellow with the National Center for Public Policy Research and author of *The Green Wave* (Capital Research Center, 2006). Indeed, sustainability is a central pillar of "Agenda 21," the 800-page global warming blueprint adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.

Consider the hazy language of sustainability in the Agenda 21 chapter on "Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability":

"The growth of world population and production combined with unsustainable consumption patterns places increasingly severe stress on the life-supporting capacities of our planet. These interactive processes affect the use of land, water, air, energy and other resources.... Population policy should also recognize the role played by human beings in environmental and development concerns. There is a need to increase awareness of this issue among decision makers at all levels and to provide both better information on which to base national and international policies and a framework against which to interpret this information."

Green Wave author Bonner Cohen notes that this sort of mind-numbing UN legalese has seeped into the administrative language of the EPA and other federal government agencies.

Perhaps deliberately green activists have never defined their terms. "The lack of

any clear understanding of what is and is not sustainable, bestows a huge amount of discretionary power in the hands of regulators and other government officials acting in accord with a term whose meaning is withheld from the public,” Cohen warns. This coming June, twenty years after the 1992 UN conference, Rio de Janeiro will again host thousands of UN delegates and activists who will come together over the issue of global warming. However, the participants at the “United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development” (informally called “Rio + 20”) will be couching their alarmist concerns in the vocabulary of sustainability.

The change in terminology is significant, and it was signaled by none other than President Obama. After his party took a beating in the 2010 mid-term elections, Obama told reporters, “There’s more than one way to skin the cat.”

The remark was sparked by Obama’s failure to get Congress to pass a cap-and-trade law regulating the production and use of fossil fuels. Instead, the President argued that emissions from greenhouse gases were so endangering the public health that the EPA must regulate them. As we now know, that conclusion is unwarranted. The EPA review process reaching this conclusion relied on a UN study whose findings were fabricated.

The evidence for this came from the release of emails from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia in Great Britain that showed politically motivated researchers gloating over how they had manipulated data to justify their global warming alarmism.

As the “climate scandal” unfolded in the news, opinion polls registered a rising skepticism about claims that human activity is responsible for climate change. A 2010 Gallup poll showed 48 percent of Americans believed the seriousness of global warming was exaggerated, up from 31 percent in 1997. Forty-two percent of Germans feared catastrophic warming, down 20 points from 2006. Only twenty-six percent of Britons believed in man-made climate change. Figures like these are the likely reason why global warming alarmists have become so eager to change the terms of debate and discuss sustainability instead.

The concept of sustainability first took off during the Clinton Administration. Charles Battig, president of the Piedmont Chapter of Virginia Scientists & Engineers for Energy & Environment (VA-SEEE), notes that in the 1990s “sustainability” joined “smart growth,” “comprehensive planning,” and “growth management” as code words cited by local, national and international agencies to justify government regulations and orders. These terms, says Battig, were popularized in a 1999 White House policy document, “Towards a Sustainable America,” released under President Clinton.

The Obama administration is now codifying the concept. In June 2010, President Obama issued an executive order launching the Ocean Policy Initiative. It calls for imposing federal zoning rules on America’s waterways—rivers and bays, the Great Lakes, and ocean coastal waters—in the name of sustainability. A year later, in June 2011, the President issued another executive order creating the White House Rural Council, which is charged

with directing government agencies to “enhance the federal engagement in rural communities.” The order, which no doubt will be used to regulate agriculture and land use, declares “strong sustainable rural communities are essential to winning the future and ensuring American competitiveness in years to come.”

Last August the National Research Council (NRC) placed its seal of approval on the concept of sustainability when it issued a report laying out what it called an “operational framework for integrating sustainability as one of the key drivers within the regulatory responsibilities of the EPA.” (The NRC is administered by the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineers and the Institute for Medicine.)

The NRC report, known as the “Green Book” inside EPA, proposes the creation of a “sustainability impact assessment” that EPA regulators can use for rulemaking. NRC cites an Obama executive order (13514) defining sustainability as “to create and maintain conditions, under which humans and nature can exist in harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations.”

Sustainability has become the latest slippery standard for letting government agencies monitor and regulate private sector decision-making. Free market advocates have good reason to worry.

The Worldwatch Institute

The Worldwatch Institute has been a leader in promoting the bogus standard of

sustainability. Founded in 1974 by Lester Brown, an economist and farmer, the Institute claims it “was the first independent research institute devoted to the analysis of global environmental concerns.” Brown, who earned a degree in agricultural science from Rutgers University in New Jersey, has authored or co-authored over 50 books, including most recently *World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse*.

In May 2001, Brown left the Worldwatch Institute to found the Earth Policy Institute (EPI), which is also committed to an “environmentally sustainable economy.” Unlike Worldwatch (2010 revenues: \$3.4 million), which has a large bureaucracy, many research projects and a network of institutional contacts, EPI (2009 revenues: \$800,000) seems to be Brown’s vanity project laying out his personal vision of “Plan B” for the world after the globe starts collapsing.

“Our early 21st century civilization is in trouble,” says Brown in an EPI press release. “We need not go beyond the world food economy to see this. Over the last few decades, we have created a food production bubble...If we cannot reverse these trends, economic decline is inevitable. No civilization has survived the ongoing destruction of its natural support systems. Nor will ours.”

Until recently, Worldwatch Institute has avoided publicity-seeking and has acted as a background provider and echo chamber, repeating and reinforcing the movement’s messages. Bonner Cohen notes that Worldwatch is one of over 4,000 environmentally active NGOs registered

with the U.N. However, Cohen notes that such a large number of environmental NGOs does not guarantee a diversity of environmental opinion.

“On the contrary, the predominant voice of the NGOs is one that speaks in terms of approaching environmental disaster... These organizations, especially the larger, well-funded ones, are superbly equipped to convince the public, government officials and the media that global action is urgently needed on whatever environmental issue the NGOs select.”

Worldwatch, which is a 501 (c)3 public charity has revenue of \$2,731,749, according to the latest financial data from 2010. Right from its inception, the group has always been well-funded by large grant makers. It relied on \$500,000 in initial funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Since 2000, Worldwatch has received at least \$1,550,000 from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, \$650,000 from David and Lucile Packard Foundation, \$360,000 from the Blue Moon Fund and \$315,000 from the (Ted) Turner Foundation, \$300,000 from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, \$200,000 from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Foundation and \$90,000 from the Wallace Global Fund.

With sustainability the latest buzz-word, Worldwatch is raising its profile. Expect it to take a major role at the upcoming Rio summit. On April 11, the organization will release *Moving Toward Sustainable Prosperity*, the latest edition in its ongoing *State of the World* publication series. The

book launch will take place at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Worldwatch’s network of more than 150 partners in 40 countries. They translate Worldwatch’s published work and present its findings to overseas government agencies and academic institutions.

Ironically, Worldwatch may be more influential abroad than it is at home. During a recent talk at Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson Center, Worldwatch president Robert Engelman implied that it’s hard to have a political conversation about sustainability because U.S. government leaders are not sufficiently participating in the environmental dialogue.

“The real challenge is that the U.N. needs help,” he said. “The whole international process of talking about these critical issues needs help. It’s not enough to argue about the language of the document. We need to find ways to promote and sell the idea that these issues really matter. They matter to Republicans, to Democrats, and Independents. They matter to people in every country.”

Engelman’s looks at the last one or two centuries of human history and he shudders. Referring to the passage of years, he told his audience that the upcoming U.N. Conference is not so much “Rio+20” but “Rio-Minus 200,000.”

According to Engelman, humankind managed to live a sustainable life for most of our 200,000 years on earth. Only lately have we separated ourselves from sustainability.

You might think the last 100 years or so has been a time of industrial development, increasing prosperity and the spread of democracy. But environmentalists like Worldwatch see an increase in climate change, distressing global consumption habits, and a growing population that threatens the sustainability of our planet and civilization. But the Rio+20 conference represents is an opportunity to “think about what sustainability really means.” He added: “When we approach a conference like Rio, we need to be thinking not just about reducing barriers to renewable energy in developing countries, but reducing barriers to sustainability in the United States.”

Does Sustainability = One Child Per Family?

In 1992 the “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development” offered up several “principles” that reflect the embarrassingly circular reasoning of sustainability advocates. Principal 8, for instance, declares: “To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, states should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.”

Economist Ron Ross observes that this kind of language is intended to create positive word associations while remaining vague and open-ended. “Clarity...is contrary to the objectives of the crusaders” Ross explains in a recent essay in the American Spectator magazine. “Global warming is too quantifiable in comparison to climate change. No one is quite sure what ‘climate change’ is or isn’t or how it can

be measured. Sustainability is even more ambiguous than climate change and thus has more sustainability as a ruse.”

Even the mainstream media is starting to notice the word-play. In a revealing interview with Reuters, Ambassador Andre Correa do Lago, Brazil’s top negotiator at the Rio+20 conference, has admitted that it is easier to promote environmentalist policies under the banner of sustainability.

“Climate change is an issue that has very strong resistance from sectors that are going to be substantially altered, like the oil industry,” do Lago said. “Sustainable development is something that is as simple as looking at how we would like to be in 10 or 20 years.”

Such sentiments obscure the extremist outlook of green activism, observes writer Robert Zubrin in a forthcoming book, *Merchants of Despair: Radical Environmentalists, Criminal Pseudo-Scientists, and the Fatal Cult of Antihumanism* (Encounter Books, 2012). Advocates of sustainability, Zubrin explains, are afraid the human species cannot take care of the earth. That’s why groups like Worldwatch continue to endorse population control policies like China’s one-child-per-family policy.

“Had China not imposed its controversial but effective one-child policy a quarter-century ago, its population today would be larger than it presently is by 300 million—roughly the whole population of the United States today, or of the entire world around the time of Genghis Khan,” observes a recent Worldwatch paper. “A generation has come of age under the plan, which is the official expression of the Chinese quest

to achieve zero population growth. China’s adoption of the one-child policy has avoided some 300 million births during its tenure; without it, the Chinese population would currently be roughly 1.6 billion—the number at which the country hopes to stabilize its population around 2050. Many experts agree that it is also the maximum number that China’s resources and carrying capacity can support...”

“Environmentalists have two core beliefs which they preach everywhere,” observes documentary filmmaker Ann McElhinney. “It’s an untrue message but it’s very popular and very dangerous. Their belief is that there are too many people and there is not enough stuff to provide for all these people’s needs. This is the core of the sustainability creed. Both are very easily and provably wrong. Both are also never supported by any rigorous scientific evidence. There aren’t too many people, if anything the real crisis is too few people being born and a demographic nightmare emerging of an ageing population without sufficient young people working to support them.”

She added: “In terms of scarce resources, environmentalists seem to get very excited and happy at the prospect of us running out of things. We are not running out of things. New discoveries of oil and natural gas for example mean we have hundreds and hundreds of years of fossil fuels to provide cheaply and reliably our energy needs.”

McElhinney and her husband Phelim McAleer are the producers of a new documentary entitled: “Frack Nation,” which sets out to debunk the environmental

myths that have been aimed against innovative drilling techniques such as “fracking.” Previously, they produced “Not Evil, Just Wrong,” a film that highlights how green activists prevent poor and vulnerable populations from having access to the bounty produced by modern science and industry.

“The way I see it our problems are not sustainability issues but the anti-development, anti-human sentiments of environmentalist who cannot offer solutions to any of the world’s issues but instead always chant their favorite mantra,” McElhinney added.

Obamacare: The Conservative Common Ground

Economic libertarians and religious conservatives can find common ground when they see the point at which the population policies endorsed by the Worldwatch Institute merge with the practices filmed by Ann McElhinny. These policies and practices are obvious in places like China and Africa but they are becoming more apparent in the United States as well.

Look at the healthcare policies of the Obama Administration. Recently promulgated regulations implementing the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act (aka “Obamacare”) have alerted conservatives of all stripes to the threat posed by the advocates of sustainability. What may begin as environmentalist philosophizing about the dangers of population growth culminates in an attack on religious liberty.

On January 20, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reaffirmed a rule included in ObamaCare that requires almost all private health care plans to cover sterilization, abortifacients, and contraception. This means the overwhelming majority of faith-based organizations, including Catholic hospitals, universities, and service organizations, must include these provisions in any insurance programs they offer their employees.

By imposing these restrictions on religious employers the Obama Administration has united conservative voters in a way that may not have been possible just a short time ago.

As former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee observed during his talk at the 2012 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC): “Morality matters even more than money. A nation that gives up its morality will willingly give up its money.”

Cato institute health care analyst Michael Tanner phrases the matter a bit differently. Instead of fixating on contraception, Tanner urges Americans to challenge government intrusion on private decision making. “The problem with the contraceptive mandate is not the contraceptive part — it’s the mandate,” Tanner wrote in a February 2012 *New York Post* commentary.

By contrast, the environmentalist left continues to lace its policies with self-righteous, moralistic rhetoric. “The conservative war on birth control is a war on women’s rights, and thus on the rights

of all of us,” claims Brad Johnson, editor of ThinkProgress Green at the Center for American Progress Action Fund. “Human-made global warming is one of the most troubling symptoms of economic and social injustice around the planet,” Johnson adds.

Engelman of Worldwatch concurs in finding the link between abortion and global warming. “Increasing women’s reproductive rights should be at the heart of the climate discussion, in the same basket as strategies like increasing energy efficiency and researching new technologies,” Engelman has said.

Can social conservatives and limited government conservatives come together to challenge the green agenda? Regent University professor of government Charles Dunn thinks so. Every year Dunn hosts the “Reagan Symposium” on the conservative movement.

“Reagan was able to weave these different coalitions together,” Dunn explained. “He understood the dominant tendency in all of them. Economic conservatism has a tendency toward capitalism and free-markets, and religious conservatives have a tendency toward orthodoxy.” The best hope now for the conservative movement is to have leadership that understands the “need for a little give and take,” he continued. “Social conservatives need the economic approaches of libertarians, but libertarians also need to understand that they can join with social conservatives to attain greater goals.”

Dunn thinks the ball is “primarily in the court” of libertarians who need to

accommodate social conservatives. But together he believes religious conservatives and libertarians can create a new “fusionism.”

Dunn advises both sides to revisit the scholarship of the late Julian Simon, who would have turned 80 in February. In two powerfully reasoned books, *The Ultimate Resource* and *The Ultimate Resource 2* Simon forcefully debunked the Malthusian thesis that expanding human populations are dangerous to the earth’s ecology.

Simon argued that robust population growth is the solution to resource scarcity and environmental challenges. When human beings are permitted to innovate through free markets, they actually expand resources and boost environmental quality. Recently energy economist Robert Bradley gathered together some pithy Simon quotes as a tribute to his memory and his scholarship. They appear on his “Master Resource” blog. Some examples:

- 1) “It’s reasonable to expect the supply of energy to continue becoming more available and less scarce, forever.”
- 2) “Discoveries, like resources, may well be infinite: the more we discover, the more we are able to discover.”
- 3) “The world’s problem is not too many people, but a lack of political and economic freedom.”

In 1980 Simon made a famous wager with Paul Ehrlich, the author of the “Population Bomb.” Ehrlich wagered that the price

for certain specified metals—copper, chromium, nickel, tin and tungsten—would rise by 1990 because an expanding population would deplete scarce resources. Simon thought the price of the metals would decline because resource scarcity would spur greater human innovation Ehrlich lost the bet and paid Simon the combined difference in the inflation-adjusted price of the metals.

Conclusion

Collectivists and statists will always favor government intervention in the economy even when their policies fail, Dunn, the Regent University professor, cautions, “With sustainability, the left is just repackaging old ideas. You get a new title and a new theme, and a new slogan. But the motives remain unchanged.”

Julian Simon answered his critics in terms that are worth revisiting if there is to be a new fusionism between libertarian and religious conservatives.

“I have written again and again that I believe that helping a couple get the number of children that couple wants is one of the great works of humanity,” he wrote. “And to the extent that governments do just that, I generally support their activities.

It is only when they conduct a coercive or propagandistic population-control program under the false label of ‘family-planning’ that I do not support the activity; it then is a limitation of peoples’ liberties rather than an extension of their capacities.”

Here again, Mel Brooks playing the part of King Louis XVI had the appropriate comment:

- “*It’s good to be the King!!*”

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Kevin Mooney is an investigative journalist for the Pelican Institute in Louisiana and a frequent contributor to Green Watch.

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GreenNotes

Peter Gleick, president of the **Pacific Institute** and one of the world's foremost advocates of anthropogenic global warming theory, has admitted to stealing confidential documents from **The Heartland Institute** in a bizarre and botched attempt to embarrass the free-market, Midwest-based think tank by exposing details of its funding. Gleick obtained the documents under false pretenses and then passed them on to liberal blogs. Now a computer analysis by Dr. **Patrick Juola** at **Duquesne University** in Pittsburgh, concludes that one of the documents, the so-called "climate strategy memo," is a fake, most likely manufactured by Gleick himself. Dr. Juola concludes his analysis: "Having examined these documents and their results, I therefore consider it more likely than not that Gleick is in fact the author/compiler of the document entitled 'Confidential Memo: 2012 Heartland Climate Strategy,' and further that the document does not represent a genuine strategy memo from the Heartland Institute." Gleick, a MacArthur "Genius Award" recipient and one of the world's most prominent climate scientists, was forced to resign as chairman of the "Task Force on Ethics" at the **American Geophysical Union** and step down from the board **National Center for Science Education** as a result of his shameful and futile deceptions.

Chevy Volt, we hardly knew ye. In March **General Motors** announced it was temporarily halting production of its much-ballyhooed electric car, the Volt. The Detroit-based motor giant said it would stop production for five weeks, temporarily laying off some 1,300 workers, but would resume production on April 23. "We needed to maintain proper inventory and make sure that we continued to meet market demand," said GM spokesman **Chris Lee** to *The Hill*. Proper inventory to meet the market demand for the Volt appears to be zero, at least for now.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is an organization ostensibly dedicated to protecting animals, and is well known for wearing its liberal heart on its proverbial sleeve. But a new report by **James McWilliams** for *The Atlantic* paints a very different picture of the group: "In 2011, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)...euthanized the overwhelming majority (PDF) of dogs and cats that it accepted into its shelters. Out of 760 dogs impounded, they killed 713, arranged for 19 to be adopted, and farmed out 36 to other shelters (not necessarily "no kill" ones). As for cats, they impounded 1,211, euthanized 1,198, transferred eight, and found homes for a grand total of five. PETA also took in 58 other companion animals -- including rabbits. It killed 54 of them." This works out to an abysmal adoption rate of 2.5 percent for dogs and 0.4 for cats. Maybe they should change their name to People for the Euthanizing Treatment of Animals... they won't even have to change the acronym.

In 2011, the U.S. Government launched the "L Prize", a competition to encourage manufacturers to make a "green" light bulb that would also be affordable to the average consumer. The winner would receive a \$10 million award, as well as the satisfaction of helping the planet by making green technology affordable. The winning light bulb, made by **Philips**, is now on the market. The cost is \$50. Per bulb. Hey, Uncle Sam - stop helping.

The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** (FWS) has proposed drastic measures to save the endangered **Northern Spotted Owl**. According to *Science Insider*: "The proposals include designating more critical habitat, encouraging logging to prevent forest fires, and an experiment to shoot a competing owl species." That's right, shoot the owls to save the owls. *Science Insider* gives the gory details: "The northern spotted owl...ran into trouble in the 1980s as its old-growth forest was severely logged in Oregon and Washington. Even though destruction of its habitat slowed dramatically after the owl was placed on the endangered species list in 1990, its numbers have continued to decrease by an average of 3% a year. A major problem is competition from barred owls, which have invaded its territories." Apparently the Feds have gotten tired of picking winners and losers in the economy and are now picking winners and losers in the game of life itself.