



AGENDA 21

The UN, Sustainability and Right-Wing Conspiracy Theory

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Executive Summary

planning and sustainability. The media needs to stop reporting on Agenda 21 as if it were a bona fide controversy and plainly state the facts about the plan. And communities around the country, some of which have

abandoned work on sustainability plans because of the heat, need to be encouraged to return to or start to develop such plans in tandem with responsible groups like the American Planning Association.

and radio conspiracist Glenn Beck, it is the leading edge of a push for “government control on a global level.” It is an “anti-human document,” a “False Religion,” a mandate to “round up” Americans, a conspiracy to cut the population by 85%, the first step toward a “police state,” a “seditious new plan” for “totalitarianism.”

U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), who led the 2013 government shutdown, even claimed it would “abolish golf courses, grazing pastures and paved roads.”

“The anti-Agenda 21 movement has had a demonstrable impact on land use policy in Virginia,” said James A. Bacon, a newsletter publisher and conservative activist who focuses on land use issues there. “The fixation on Agenda 21 creates a bizarre distraction from the very real challenge of articulating principled conservative positions on how to manage growth, development and the environment — issues that won’t go away just because we choose to ignore them. Sadly, just uttering the words ‘Agenda 21’ is sufficient in some quarters to shut down the discussion.”

Back to the Beginning

To be sure, when Agenda 21 was adopted at the so-called Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, it was heralded as a key agreement, the first global effort to take on what was increasingly seen as a looming environmental crisis.

In a semi-official 1993 book explaining the plan, Daniel Sitarz described it enthusiastically as “a document of hope,” a “comprehensive blueprint for humanity to use to forge its way into the next century by proceeding more gently upon the Earth. As its sweeping programs are implemented world-wide, it will eventually impact on every human activity on our planet. Deep and dramatic changes in human society are proposed by this monumental historic agreement.”

Sitarz was being optimistic, to say the least.

Perhaps because the document was, in fact, so sweeping — even though it contained no requirements, enforcement mechanisms or even significant funding — it quickly came under attack from conservatives in the United States. In the years that followed, a surprising number of conservatives and right-wingers took on the basic premise of the plan, disputing the world’s scientists on such issues as global warm-

ing, the ozone layer, rising oceans and a host of related problems.

Many of those opponents saw Agenda 21 as inimical to business and industry — it did, after all, focus on carbon emissions and related issues — and also believed that it represented an attack on property rights because it proposed to not allow owners completely unfettered use of their lands and businesses.

But to denizens of the radical right, particularly those involved in the growing antigovernment “Patriot” movement, it was worse than that. Agenda 21, they insisted, was merely the latest step in a dismal march toward a totalitarian, socialistic “one world government,” or New World Order.

and shifts in concentrations of people. By 2050, the Census Bureau expects the population to grow by 40% to 440 million people, and huge numbers of baby boomers are expected to very shortly begin moving to smaller homes and, in many cases, different parts of the country, as they retire.

There has been something of a backlash to the anti-Agenda 21 movement. In 2012, for instance, an anti-sustainable development bill was killed in Arizona after the state Chamber of Commerce lobbied against it, saying it could drive away firms with sustainable development plans, according to the Huffington Post.

“I think the Tea Party people who turn up shouting at planning meetings are heading for a McCarthy

moment,” said Chattanooga, Tenn., Mayor Ron Littlefield, in a reference to Communist witch hunter and Wisconsin Sen. Joseph McCarthy, according to the Post. “Many people are sick of their scare tactics.”

That may well be. But an enormous number of politicians, commentators, activists, conspiracy theorists and others have swallowed the story of the anti-Agenda 21 zealots, making any kind of ratio

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The Players: Anti-Agenda 21 Activists

prudence to its Biblical foundations and to limit the federal government to its Constitutional boundaries.” It opposes almost all immigration, abortion even in cases of rape or incest, and the federal income tax.

The party, which at one point absorbed the American Independent Party (the vehicle for segregationist Alabama Gov. George Wallace’s own 1968 run for the presidency), is also very much against U.S. participation in international institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, as well as foreign aid.

So it wasn’t much of a surprise when, in 2012, the group took a position on Agenda 21 that described it as “a comprehensive plan of utopian environmentalism, social engineering, and global political control.” The resolution went on to say the plan was being “covertly advanced in local communities” and would attack private ownership of homes, farms and cars “as destructive to the environment.”

It also described Agenda 21 as leading to “socialist/communist redistribution of wealth” — words almost identical to those used by the Republican National Committee, which also denounced Agenda 21 in its own January 2012 resolution.

The plan has been repeatedly denounced at the local level by the Constitution Party as well. Bernie De Castro, the party’s Florida chairman, said: “Agenda 21 is the most dangerous threat to America’s sovereignty that is coming at us like a whirlwind and yet so few Americans are aware of this diabolical threat to them and their families.” The Hollywood, Fla., chapter invited Rosa Koire of Democrats Against UN Agenda 21 (see below) to speak at its June 2012 meeting.

The party’s Arizona chapter recently produced its own resolution on the plan: “We call for a return to the states and to the people all lands which are held by the federal government without authorization by the Constitution.” And its Allegheny County, Pa., chapter urged its members to attend a March 2012 presentation by the conspiracy-minded John Birch Society (see below) on Agenda 21.

CONSTITUTIONAL SHERIFFS AND PEACE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

Executive Director: Richard Mack
 Headquarters: Higley, Ariz.
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Richard Mack, who won fame on the far right for successfully challenging some aspects of the Brady gun control legislation, is the Executive Director of the

After that, Koire sounds like most Agenda 21 fear-mongers. “[Y]our local government is in the process of controlling where and how you live, what you eat, what your children learn, and what laws you will live under.” She also says on her website that the Agenda 21 plan means “to inventory and control all land, all water, all minerals, all plants, all animals, all construction, all means of production, all energy, all education, all information, and all human beings in the world.”

Koire authored a 2011 book, *Behind the Green Mask: U.N. Agenda 21*,

it “penetrates the history of the global elite’s effort to create world government.”



would eliminate your private property rights through eminent domain.”

“Choose Freedom,” the website declares. “Stop Agenda 21.”

From its headquarters in Appleton, Wis., about two miles from where the remains of serial libeler and Sen. Joseph McCarthy are buried, the society produces slick anti-Agenda 21 pamphlets and DVDs, shipping them to JBS chapters and supporters across the country. The society also relies on staffers like Hal Shurtleff to get the anti-Agenda 21 word out.

An Army veteran and father of five, Shurtleff is the indefatigable field director of the Birch Society on the

East Coast. Since 2011, not long after JBS began its anti-Agenda 21 crusade in earnest, Shurtleff has conducted more than 70 presentations in public libraries, rec center basements and hotel conference rooms about the perils to freedom of Agenda 21.

From California to Maine, other JBS chapter leaders have been doing the same.

“We have established a good network of freedom activists who know how to identify Agenda 21 initiatives,” Shurtleff says. “We use Facebook, social media and E-mails. There are dozens of Facebook pages dedicated to Agenda 21 as well as hundreds of Tea Party type groups.”

In recent years, Agenda 21 has become an effective rallying cry, organizing tool and bludgeon that right-wing groups have been using to beat back local sustainable growth and anti-sprawl initiatives, including everything from bike paths to smart meters on home appliances. The attacks have caught city councils, planning commissions and smart-growth advocates across the country off guard, leaving them scrambling to mount a defense.

“I had not heard about it [Agenda 21] before they [the county commissioners] started touting it,” Arthur C. Dyas, a member of the Planning and Zoning Commission for 16 years, the last few as chairman, told the SPLC. “Our plan had nothing to do with Agenda 21. I called one of the county commissioner’s hands on it and he just about shouted me down. By, God, this was all about Agenda 21 and the United Nations. And I’m like, ‘What are you talking?’

“It made absolutely no sense to me,” Dyas continued. “I like to believe that he really didn’t think it was about Agenda 21, that he was just using that to beat our brains in with it. But I’m not sure. I’m not sure whether he believed it or not. I just think it was really sad and a disservice to the people of this county for the County Commission to have rescinded it.”

The award-winning Horizon 2025 was replaced a year later, in October 2013, by a substantially shorter plan, “with a lot fewer words,” County Commissioner Burt said. “The new plan,” he added, “is more direct and to the point and just easier to understand. It’s more concise. Our United States Constitution is a pretty short document, too.”

Since the death of Horizon 2025, Baldwin County has become a sort of Rorschach test. For those who believe Agenda 21 means the beginning of the end of American freedoms – from property rights to gun ownership – Baldwin County was a triumph of the will of the people. To supporters of smart and sustainable growth, such as Cara Smallwood, one of the Baldwin County 9, what happened that day in Bay Minette, the county seat, was “simply crazy.”

“I felt we were being demonized by the County Commission,” Smallwood told the SPLC. “They were beating the scary government drum. It’s the age of the Tea Party, all government is bad. That’s why they threw an amazing, award-winning plan into the trash.”

A Plan to be Proud Of

For years, the Planning and Zoning Commission tried to get a handle on the county’s explosive growth.

Retirees were flooding in to take advantage of the miles of sandy white beaches, piney woods, warm weather and relatively low cost of living in Baldwin County on the Gulf of Mexico. Young families were also flocking to Baldwin, clogging the roads and causeways as they commuted back and forth to nearby Mobile for work. From 1990 to 2000, the county experienced a 42.9% increase in its population. Meanwhile, subdivisions were popping up everywhere, with little consideration given to how the many projects fit with each other, the environment and the future. “There was no control over development,” said Dyas, the former chairman of the planning commission. “It was a train wreck.”

There was so much development, going up so fast, that Planning and Zoning Commission meetings would sometimes start at 6 in the evening and end at 4 the next morning. Next, the meetings were split in two: subdivisions on the first Thursday of the month, zoning on the third. “Hell, we were still going from 6 until midnight, 1 o’clock,” Dyas said. “It was unbelievable.”

In 2009, after days of public hearings held by the Planning and Zoning Commission, thousands of man- and woman-hours, and hundreds of thousands of dollars, the Baldwin County comprehensive plan was adopted by the County Commission by a vote of 3 to 1. “The comprehensive plan was just that, a plan,” Dyas said. “It was not a law. It was not an ordinance. It was a plan, something to use as a guide in future development of a given area.”

The following year, the Baldwin County Planning and Zoning Department was awarded the Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association’s 2010 Outstanding Planning Award for Horizon 2025. In its newsletter, the chapter praised the plan, saying “Since its adoption, environmental concerns and livability are now also considerations when development is proposed.”

“As for developers,” the newsletter added, “the plan lends stability to the development process – there is now a guide for where development can be located, how it can be developed and its best and most compatible uses. The plan is intended to provide foresight and remove some of the guess work from development to ultimately allow the realization of the County’s vision.”

But by then the great recession had already swept across America and development projects from Maine to California to Baldwin County came to a screeching halt. Bulldozers now sat still and silent

in the Alabama sun. Planning and zoning meetings went back to once a month. At some meetings there were no items on the agenda. One meeting lasted a record six minutes. “That’s how fast it tanked down here,” Dyas said. “So, the plan really never had a chance to be fully implemented into the process here in Baldwin County.”

Still, two new county commissioners, who were elected after running on a platform opposed to the plan as too restrictive and intrusive, vowed to rescind it as soon as possible. Now the balance of power was reversed, setting the stage for the Aug. 7, 2012, meeting and the end of Horizon 2025.

Black Helicopters and Baldwin County

Baldwin County officials said the meeting on the fate of Horizon 2025 was called because there was concern that the county’s comprehensive plan did not adhere to Alabama’s new anti-Agenda 21 law, which went into effect in January 2013.

In the days leading up to the meeting, fliers were distributed warning of the “massive land grab repre-

helicopters these days” because earlier that spring the Republican National Committee drew up “a very strong anti-Agenda 21 resolution.”

A watered-down version of that resolution was eventually included in the party platform for the 2012 presidential election. “We’ve got black helicopter peo-

