

**A Rough Road Out of Rio:
The Right-Wing Reaction in the United States
Against Global Environmentalism**

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Most of the delegates to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro came from countries which sincerely supported the meeting's professed values and ecological goals. On this count, however, the representatives of the United States stood apart from the rest. Because of President Bush 's opposition to the meeting's climate change and biodiversity treaties, the 300 American delegates intransigently resisted the conference's basic agenda, which severely dampened the entire affair's overall diplomatic success. This difference is significant. While the other chapters in this collection have examined the more positive intended effects of the Rio summit outside of America, this section looks more closely at a few of its negative unintended effects on politics in the United States.

Since 1992, the melioristic tenor of Rio has been spun very perversely in the U.S. as a threatening, new menace to its national sovereignty, economic security, and domestic economy. While many of these anti-environmental interpretations of the Rio summit first came from the extreme right, they soon were endorsed, albeit obliquely, by the Bush administration as it felt the mounting pressures of the 1992 presidential primaries. Even though Bush lost the 1992 election, and the victorious Clinton-Gore ticket has espoused more pro-environment views, this new Democratic government holds views on free trade, engaged globalism, and American superpower that closely parallel those of President Bush. Yet, these Cold War internationalist positions have only inflamed the nationalistic right-wing backlash against transnational economics and ecology.

In fact, the split over international ecology agreements, like those propounded at the Rio Summit, express some of the most fundamental divisions now splitting the American body politic during the post-Cold War era. This chapter, then, will examine these political conflicts and ideological contradictions as they have surfaced all over the United States in the aftermath of the Earth Summit at Rio. It surveys the public discourse about the Rio conference, first, during the days leading into the 1992 summit and then afterwards in order to, second, illustrate how this global meeting has become reinterpreted in such a menacing manner to many American citizens.

I. The Earth Summit and Its Promise

After two years of planning and preparatory meetings, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was convened in Rio de Janeiro on June 3-14, 1992. Nearly 50,000 people from 170 countries attended these meetings to reassess the world's overall record of environmental progress and ecological degradation as it has developed since the first United Nations Conference on Environment held in Stockholm during 1972. The 1972 conference had made some real advances. It drew up the UN Environment Program, an Action Plan with 109 recommendations, and initial understandings on biodiversity protection (Nixon, 1992: 38). Before the Rio summit, many hoped that it too might prove to be a watershed event that would change the direction of human history, like the treaties of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna, or the San Francisco Charter. New nations from the mostly poor, industrializing South wanted the richer, industrialized North to

limit their pollution and provide more development aid; older countries in the North hoped the nations of the South would make greater efforts to curb their population growth and protect biodiversity (Adler with Hager, 1992: 22). Very little real progress has been made after the meeting, because of the unwillingness of both sides to either make real unilateral concessions or engage in serious joint collaboration. Even though the United States has purported to be "pro-environment" to all of its domestic and foreign audiences, the Bush administration persistently maintained throughout the proceedings that "the American life-style is not up for negotiation" (Elmer-Dewitt, 1992: 58).

As a Washington Post editorial remarked, the Rio summit in the eyes of official Washington was not about global warming or species depletion. Instead, it was read as being about environment and development, or "translating economic wealth into genuinely better living conditions over the next generation" (June 3, 1992: A18). Because just about every government in the world would be represented, many hoped the meeting also could make "a contribution to the education of governments, particularly the one here in Washington" (June 3, 1992: A18). Unfortunately, as subsequent events during the 1990s have shown, this educational potential essentially was lost on both the American people and its government in Washington.

The Rio summit on the environment, for all the promise held by its impressive convocation of the world's countries, nongovernmental organizations, and environmentalists, did not

produce many decisive outcomes due to a certain lack of decisive leadership (Babbit, 1992; Shabecoff, 1992; Begley, 1992). Going into the summit, 139 countries had voted for a mandatory stabilization agreement on greenhouse gas emissions, which would have fixed year 2000 outputs at 1990 levels. From the beginning, the Bush administration disagreed with these targets (Rensberger, 1992: A22). Only the U.S. was standing in opposition to this accord in March 1992; yet, by May, most of the European nations, led by Germany, also were wavering. The targets on emissions were moved, and the mandatory enforcement provisos of the agreement were revoked by the time the Rio conference was convened. Still, the European Community with Germany in the lead won plaudits for its firm commitment to work with the developing countries, regulate greenhouse gases, and provide \$4 billion in environmental aid (Weisskopf, 1992a: A1, 8). By and large, Japan played no special role in the conference, while Russia and the former Soviet republics only sought minimal recognition of their difficulties in making the transition to a market economy. Most developing nations placed their major emphasis, like President Bush and the United States, on promoting more economic growth (Greenhouse, 1992: 4-6). Mexico's President Carlos Salinas, for example, nodded with respect to "nature's equilibriums," but he also asserted that "the cause of ecology must not be converted into the cause of protectionism" (Weisskopf and Devroy, 1992: A26). Consequently, none of the Earth Summit's agreements were legally binding, and there was no effective means of insuring

real compliance with any measures endorsed by the conferences in Rio (Lewis, 1992: 10).

By the end of the proceedings, very few real achievements could be attributed to the gathering. Of course, some general ideals were affirmed. The Rio Declaration, a six page philosophical brief connecting poverty to environmental degradation, and Agenda 21, a lengthy blueprint for many environmental reforms, were approved by the assembled body, but these were totally non-binding declarations carrying only moral force to insure compliance (Weisskopf and Devroy, 1992: A1, 12). A statement of principles on forest preservation was discussed; yet, poor, timber producing countries resisted a tough treaty to protect the world's forests as wildlife habitats, carbon sinks, and biodiversity preserves. A binding treaty on biodiversity was drawn up. The United States, however, refused to sign it, arguing that it would cripple the nation's booming biotechnology industries (Robinson and Preston, 1992: A1, 26). And, the climate change convention on greenhouse gases was accepted, but without specific targets or time tables for reductions, even though most nations made a moral commitment to keep year 2000 emissions at 1990 levels (Elmer-Dewitt, 1992: 58).

In many ways, the Earth Summit in Rio was organized to mediate some new shared understandings between the highly industrial countries of the North and the newly industrializing nations of the South (Easterbrook, 1992: 33). The nations of the North were to concede their responsibility for polluting their own backyards, and everyone else's, while the countries in the

South were to strike a fresh bargain with the North not to repeat all of the North's industrial missteps. The South was to pledge protection for biodiversity within their borders in exchange for aid, and the North was to provide aid to get real protections for the biosphere in the South. Regrettably, however, things on this account neither started out well nor ended positively. William K. Reilly, head of the United States' Environmental Protection Agency, indicated on the eve of the conference that Washington was concerned about "a certain amount of posturing by developing countries to try to get us to contribute more funds" when, in fact, "those contributions are not in the cards" (Weisskopf and Robinson, 1992: A21). Similarly, Ting Wen Lian, Malaysia's ambassador to U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization complained about such "high-handed" diplomatic tactics, while suggesting that Third World nations would not be cast as "scapegoats" for the world's environmental crises (Weisskopf and Robinson, 1992: A21). When the conference ended, the United States had not shifted from its original intransigent positions. Reilly continued to claim, in keeping with the Bush administration, that signing all of the Rio treaties was out of the question. Indeed, it would be "contrary to the interests of the United States" (Weisskopf and Robinson, 1992: A23). Maurice Strong, the multimillionaire architect of the Rio Earth Summit, estimated \$6 or \$7 billion was pledged by the assembled nations to aid the poor countries of the South; yet, the U.S. essentially balked at a binding pledge to give only 0.7 percent of its GNP to pay for sustainable development in the Third World (Shabecoff, 1992: 101,

99). These penny pitching tactics only demonstrated, once again, to Strong how few of the world's powerful nations saw the close connection between global economic inequalities and worldwide ecological disasters (Saul, 1992: 32-33). For a man in search of "historic civilizational change" (Preston, 1992: B1), Rio proved to be frustrating.

II. The Official American Opposition to Rio

The American response to the Rio conference cannot be comprehended without recognizing that the diplomatic positions of official Washington often reveal very little about where most of the state or civil society actually stand. On one level, environmentalism is treated as a "Mom and apple pie" issue in everyday political life: everyone says they want clean air, clean water, clean land. On a second level, however, environmentalism often plays out as a very selfish type of localism: NIMBYism on either the neighborhood or national level always pushes for others to incur all the costs of otherwise narrowly distributed benefits. On a third level, environmentalism increasingly is being typecast as a real threat to "the American way of life." Dictatorial state regulators, who undoubtedly are socialists, want to take away backyard barbecues, fast cars, red meat, and air conditioners in the name of the ozone layer, global climate, international equity, and world environment. In other words, the various levels of the government bureaucracy and diverse quarters of civil society are becoming quite divided over the real meaning of the environmental

crisis, which makes it easy for all Americans to be easily divided by mismanaged ecological concerns.

The Rio Declaration's sense of alarm, then, clearly is not at all shared by many neoliberals and nationalists, who are now the recruits for antiglobalization fundamentalist movements in the United States. While the Earth might have an "integral and interdependent nature," this does not necessarily require everyone to conform to economic, political, and social directives from would-be transnational ecocrats intent upon protecting what they imagine is "the global environmental and developmental system" (Grubb *et al.*, 1993: 87). On one level, neoliberals and nationalists rightly complain the operational science that documents like the Rio Declaration rest upon is nothing but ordinary scientific research. As such, it is completely contestable, entirely subject to second opinion, and expressly mandates by itself no clear moral solutions (Rensberger, 1992: A1, 22). On a second level, antiglobalization advocates see the figure of globalization as a new strategy for simply redistributing the costs and benefits of unequal growth from one network of currently overprivileged localities to another collection of presently underprivileged localities. Both implicitly acknowledge there are great disparities within and between nations, but anti-transnational, anti-intergovernmental, anti-environmental resistances explicitly oppose any policies that will take something away from the United States in general, or impose new costs upon particular localities with the U.S., in

order to benefit some other unknown nations and localities elsewhere.

The American position at the Rio summit, which was defined by a Bush administration still flush with success after the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, ironically, was not very yielding to international pressures during the June 1992 conference. During his official speech, Bush told the assembly of world leaders that "America's position on the environmental protection is second to none, so I did not come here to apologize" (Greenhouse, 1992: 4-1). Consequently, the U.S. compelled everyone to accept a very weakened version of the climate change treaty, and it refused to sign the biodiversity accord, suggesting that both initiatives would damage America's economic growth and industrial performance (Weisskopf, 1992b: A42). Caught in a tough reelection race at home because of three and a half years of very little real economic progress, which left high percentages of Bush supporters during the 1992 primary season in New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin saying they wanted any other GOP candidate besides President Bush (Belliveau *et al.*, Washington Post, June 5, 1992: A12), Bush stressed the salient importance of "the economy" over all environmental concerns.

In fact, the Bush administration was quite strident, attacking Japan and Germany as latecomers to the ecological cause, rebuking indigenous peoples for worrying excessively about local biodiversity, and dismissing larger efforts to cap year 2000 carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels (Begley *et al.*,

1992: 30-33). Germany's Minister of the Environment, Klaus Topfer, explicitly articulated his country's alarm over these hardnosed American positions. Fearing that the Cold War rivalry over ideology between East and West was being supplanted by a new North-South rivalry over the environment, Topfer said, "I am afraid that conservatives in the United States are picking 'ecologism' as their new enemy" (Greenhouse, 1992: 4-1).

Even though tough environmental regulations have sparked the creation of almost 70,000 environmental companies with nearly two million employees and \$130 billion in sales (Schneider, 1992: A4), President Bush rebuffed the Rio conference's biodiversity negotiators. In a news conference prior to the Rio summit, Bush reaffirmed, on the one hand, that "I will not sign a treaty that in my view throws too many Americans out of work," and, on the other hand, he refused "criticism from what I consider some of the extremes in the environmental movement, internationally and domestically" (Schneider, 1991: A4). In this open assault on all environmentalists, foreign and domestic, who opposed his allegedly strong ecological record, Bush echoed antiecological claims made by the network of timber, coal mining, agriculture, and land developing interests allied together in the wise use movement across the American West (Harvey, 1996: 384-385). Bush's take on the Earth Summit was captured best in an interview with Jornal do Brasil on the eve of his departure to Rio: "I am president of the United States, not president of the world, and I'll do what is best to defend U.S. interests" (cited in Shabecoff, 1992: 89).

This official White House approach simply stuck to a nationalistic neoliberal understanding of the world's economy and ecology. Partly a response to global economic competitions, and partly a response to global ecological scarcities, today's neoliberal and antiglobal readings of the earth's political economy construct the attainment of national economic growth, security, and prosperity as a zero-sum game. Having more material wealth or economic growth in one place, like the U.S.A. or any given locality within its borders, means not having it in other places, namely, rival foreign nations and all of their many local communities. These positions also assume material scarcity is an inflexible constraint; hence, all resources, everywhere and at any time, should be treated as private property whose productive potentials must be subjected ultimately to economic exploitation and not obstructed by ecological regulation.

Many anti-transnational and anti-environmental popular groups in the U.S. accept the prevailing form of mass market consumerism as it presently exists, because it defines many material private benefits as the public ends that advanced economies ought to seek (Harvey, 1998: 383-385). This, then, affirms the need for hard discipline in elaborate programs of local productivism, only now couched within rhetorics of highly politicized national competition, as the means for sustaining mass market consumer lifestyles in advanced nations like the United States. Creating economic growth, and producing more of it than other equally aggressive developed and developing countries, is the sine qua non of "national security" in the

1990s. As Richard Darman, President Bush's chief of the Office of Management and Budget declared after Earth Day in 1990, "Americans did not fight and win the wars of the twentieth century to make the world safe for green vegetables" (cited in Sale, 1993: 77). Not everyone in the U.S., then, sees environmentalism as tantamount to moral salvation by leaving behind an entire way of life tied to using increased levels of natural resources to accelerate economic growth.

These nationalistic readings of the environment have sparked some new discourses about collective social responsibility into life. Even the green geo-politics of the Clinton administration carries a very nativistic reading in its codes of ecological reflexivity. This became obvious when President Clinton made green geo-politics an integral part of his global doctrine of "engagement" in 1995. "To reassert America's leadership in the post-Cold War world," and in moving "from the industrial to the information age, from the Cold War world to the global village," President Clinton opened up to both antiglobalization localists and neoliberal nationalists when he asserted "we know that abroad we have the responsibility to advance freedom and democracy--to advance prosperity and the preservation of our planet....in a world where the dividing line between domestic and foreign policy is increasingly blurred....Our personal, family, and national future is affected by our policies on the environment at home and abroad. The common good at home is simply not separate from our efforts to advance the common good around the world. They must

be one in the same if we are to be truly secure in the world of the 21st century" (Foreign Policy Bulletin, 1995: 43).

The Rio summit simply turns into one more piece in an emergent mosaic of international accords and transnational understandings that are disturbing for many Americans as they contemplate the world system, and their nation's place within it, after the Cold War. Along with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) agreements and the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) negotiations in 1993, the Rio summit in 1992 and the Kyoto climate conference in 1997 all now appear to be, as Henry Kissinger celebrates, the emerging architecture of "a new international system," which will permit the U.S. to take the final steps toward "the new world order" (1993: 1C). Advocates of "free trade" and "sustainable development," like Henry Kissinger, George Bush, Warren Christopher, and Bill Clinton, support the growing openness of the American economy and environment to global competition and regulation. For others, however, like Ross Perot, Jerry Brown, Jesse Jackson, and Patrick Buchanan, the dictates of Agenda 21 or NAFTA represent more than restrictions of greenhouse gas emissions or industrial jobs going to the South. Instead, they now are all "about American sovereignty going south" (Buchanan, 1998: 264).

III. Antiglobalism and Ultrnationalism in the U.S.

Many Americans will resist intrusions of any sort into their material way of life, but the most active and militant opposition to transnational environmentalism comes from loosely organized

but quite widespread conservative groups, like the self-identified Patriot movement. Spanning a very narrow band of the ideological spectrum from the Christian Identity, Counties' Rights, Wise Use and National Taxpayers' Union to the John Birch Society, Ku Klux Klan, Posse Comitatus, and Christian Coalition, this growing band of fellow travelers also counts many right-to-life, neo-nazi, gun advocates, and anti-semitic groups among its ranks. United by their distaste for what they imagine as the New World Order, these ultranationalist groups all see themselves as legitimate expressions of the popular sovereignty underpinning the American republic. Like other militant, self-organized, and well-armed associations of citizens throughout the history of the United State, the Confederate States, or the original colonies of North America, these nationalists now dispute the decision-making authority and legitimacy of the state behind today's incumbent bipartisan regime of free trade globalists.

After the siege at Waco and the passage of NAFTA in 1993, many Patriot groups turned up the rhetorical heat in their interpretations of the present moment. For many, the activities of the Clinton administration, in particular, soon,

led to the conviction that the government was proceeding to disarm citizens, to subdue them later, submitting Americans to surveillance from hidden cameras, and black helicopters, and implanting biochips in the newborn. To this global threat, on jobs, on privacy, on liberty, on the American way of life, they oppose the Bible and the original American Constitution, expunged of its Amendments. In accordance with these texts, both received from God, they affirm the sovereignty of citizens and its direct expression in county governments, not acknowledging the authority of the federal government, its laws, its

courts, as well as the validity of the Federal Reserve Bank (Castells, 1997: 86-87).

Not surprisingly, the Patriot movement has little use for any international resolutions to preserve the environment that the current federal government has chosen to back with diplomatic, economic, and scientific support.

For antiglobalization advocates, there is, in fact, no better example of the New World Order than the workings of transnational environmental conferences, groups, and institutions as they have emerged out of the Montreal ozone protocols or the Rio environmental conference. All of them appear clearly poised to extinguish American economic and political sovereignty. When positioned alongside other more bread-and-butter decisions imposed by the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations, even feel-good issues, like protecting the environment or preserving biodiversity, assume a more insidious quality for those who question the liberal meliorism of these international institutions. Such organizations are interpreted as a very real threat to the American way of life, particularly to the well-paying jobs, privacy rights, personal freedoms, and political powers of individual American citizens.

The Preamble to Agenda 21 from the Earth Summit on the global environment at Rio is full of technocratic talk that highlights the policy imperatives, not for individuals, localities or even nations, but rather for all human beings, planetary ecosystems or especially global partnerships:

Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. However, integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfillment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can - in a global partnership for sustainable development (Grubb et al., 1993:).

Because many communities in the U.S. already enjoy a safe, prosperous present, antiglobalization advocates see these sorts of pious liberal pledges expressing a set of transnational tactics to reduce their local community's security and prosperity. Moreover, the vague designs of a "global partnership for sustainable development" upsets neoliberals and nationalists in the U.S. who believe existing markets are working well enough to serve American national interests.

Transnational environmentalism cannot strike a worthwhile bargain for the United States, because it apparently stands for an unknown, unfixed and untrustworthy "environmentalist transnation" whose ecocratic overseers will be certain to put postnational ecosystemic interests over and before the national economic interests of Americans. Even though they would be extremely wary of some antiglobalization localists, elite groups of neoliberal nationalists also share this deep suspicion of well-meaning global conferences, like the 1992 Rio conference on the environment, that try to renegotiate the terms of global political economy by using ecological values to change who gets what, where, when, and how. Antiglobalization localists fear

their already marginal economic security will be abridged in the hope of enhancing life somewhere in China, India or Brazil where poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy are all quite severe. Yet, making this move also will certainly bring most of these negative factors very quickly down to many Americans on a local level. Neoliberals and nationalists, in turn, fear too many of these global partnerships will not sustain America's continuing economic development in the hopes of jogging new development elsewhere outside the U.S. Almost every American industry feels this heat. When the U.S. produces full-sized vans in Ford automobile plants that date from 1919 and require twice as much energy per vehicle produced as comparable Japanese auto plants (Weisskopf, 1992: A1), the ecological costs and economic benefits of America's existing sovereignty gets put into a more revealing global perspective.

IV. Anti-Statism as Anti-Environmentalism

These dynamics have been building in the U.S. since 1968. Amidst a losing war in Vietnam, an inability to halt the spread of Soviet-style communism, a stagnation in average family income, and an apparent favoritism for racial minorities over the white majority, a widespread backlash began to build against the cosmopolitan values of New Deal and Great Society liberalism in the early 1970s. The events of Waco, Ruby Ridge, and Oklahoma City in the 1990s are not entirely the work of a lunatic minority. They do express the rage of many rural, white, working class Americans, who now distrust almost all government officials, corporate middlemen, and scientific experts. In many

cases, these men and women have been struggling for decades to establish and/or maintain their place upon America's vast middle classes. As the economy and environment of the United States were opened up to foreign competition and pressure during the 1970s by corporate liberals with free trade ideals and transnational environmentalist values, "a growing number of white men in rural America had come to believe that this kind of liberalism had little or nothing to offer to them" (Stock, 1997: 150).

In partisan terms, these citizens were angry. Even so, when they vote, most are not always racist, sexist or conservative in their politics. During 1968, the vast majority of those who voted for George Wallace of Alabama named Robert F. Kennedy as their second choice for President (Bennett, 1988: 337). It was the anti-elitism, populism, and anti-corporate tone of both Wallace and Kennedy that excited these people. Richard Nixon, of course, named them "the silent majority," but mostly they were, as this odd preference ordering for George Wallace or Bobby Kennedy suggests, those Americans "for whom New Deal and Great Society liberalism had not delivered on its promise, if it had made a promise at all" (Stock, 1997: 152). In 1980, many of these voters turned out for Ronald Reagan; and in 1992, they voted for Bill Clinton. Each time, they basically were seeking something new, something different, something not unlike what was expressed in the words of Bill Clinton at the launch of his 1996 campaign when he exclaimed that "the age of big government is over" (New York Times, January 24, 1996: A14).

Endorsing environmental efforts, like Agenda 21 or the Rio Declaration, however, is not a sign of big government going away. In fact, this sort of transnational environmental treaty seems far more ominous to far too many ordinary Americans, because it looks like the era of big American government will end only to be replaced by an era of even bigger foreign governance: the New World Order. This fracture down the center of the Cold War consensus is what defines much of America's politics in the 1990s, and there is every indication that it will continue into the next century as new environmental imperatives are pushed more and more onto center stage in Washington and every state capital. "Within both parties," as Buchanan asserts, "nationalists are in rancorous conflict with the globalists....this is the new conflict of the age that succeeds the Cold War" (Buchanan, 1998: 265).

Repudiating even weak environmental regulations, such as those from the Rio Summit, represents America's new populist "economic nationalism" very well. For many average Americans, the work of the EPA within the U.S. is living proof that "environmental policy is out of control, costing jobs, depressing living standards and being run by politicians, scheming business people and social extremists" (Brimelow and Spencer, 1992: 59). Nationalistic populists believe in "wise use" philosophies of market-driven conservationism, but they do not endorse stronger campaigns to regulate consumer choice or producer prerogative directly by intrusive state intervention in the name of all

humanity. Buchanan, for example, is quite explicitly anti-global in his version of economic nationalism, which means,

tax and trade policies that put America before the Global Economy, and the well-being of our own people before what is best for "mankind." Trade is not all end in itself; it is the means to an end, to a more just society and more self-reliant nation. Our trade and tax policies should be designed to strength U.S. Sovereignty and independence and should manifest a basis toward domestic, rather than foreign, commerce. For as von Mises said, peaceful commerce binds people together, and Americans should rely more on one another (1998: 228).

The efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, losses of biodiversity, and ozone destroying compounds can be dismissed as being based upon shoddy science and/or devious diplomacy: both of which certainly seem aimed at curtailing American sovereignty. Consequently, any additional attempts to impose unwanted environmental regulations must be, according to America's new anti-globalists, held before the demanding bar of an enlightened nationalism. The purposes of economic and environmental policy in the United States are not "to proper mankind--but Americans first: our workers, farmers, businessmen, manufacturers. And what is good for the Global Economy is not automatically good for America" (Buchanan, 1998: 284).

Grassroots opposition such as this to major international agreements on the environment also affects many higher level policy deliberations. Before the U.S. delegation departed to the conference on the global climate in Kyoto during 1997, the Senate unanimously passed the Byrd-Hagel resolution, which states the United States must not sign any agreement on greenhouse gas emissions unless it stipulates specific commensurate reductions

for developing nations. Sponsored by Senators Robert Byrd (D) of West Virginia and Chuck Hagel (R) of Nebraska, this bipartisan resolution has influenced the debates and negotiations over the December 1997 treaty at home and abroad (Passacantando, 1998: C5). On one level, this resolution marks an intense level of lobbying by coal, gas, and oil interests in the United States, who do not want their markets to shrink until Mexico, India, China, and Brazil also agree to reduce their consumption of dirty fossil fuels. On another level, however, these moves also express the anxieties of ordinary voters who do not want their own high paying jobs or everyone's national security to be negotiated away in the name of environmental regulation only to have the jobs reappear at unregulated sites somewhere in the Third World because Mexico, India, China or Brazil were exempted by the treaty.

For many Americans, even very conventional forms of environmentalism, including the initiatives advanced at the Montreal, Rio, Cairo or Kyoto international conferences on CFCs, climate, the environment, or population, can be cast as a serious threat to private property rights and individual free enterprise. U.S. Representative and Nevada Republican John Ensign, for example, attacks the leaders of the environmental movement, domestic and foreign, as "socialists" or "collectivists" who want to use big government, ecological regulations, and international treaties to take away people's private property. In a recent campaign speech in his race for a U.S. Senate seat in Nevada, he repeated some very widespread beliefs: "If you look at what

modern environmentalists have become, they have become not about protecting the environment, but they have become about big government and regulations and putting things out of the hands of private citizens" (Vogel, 1998: 8B).

Because the environment has become a mainstream value for most Americans, such conservative voices cannot dismiss it. They instead must endorse a particular type of environmentalism that emphasizes human stewardship of the environment against the environmental movement's apparent anti-humanism. As Michael S. Berliner, the executive director of the Ayn Rand Institute, suggests, Earth Day should actually be called "Anti-Human Day," because the environmentalists behind such events believe nature ought to be revered "for its own sake, irrespective of any benefit to man" (Berliner, 1998: 1E). Conservative stewardship, on the other hand, argues in political debates and policy deliberations "the Earth is here for us. We are to be good stewards; we are to take care of it" (Vogel, 1998: 8B). In fact, the preservation of private property rights for many conservatives will give all humans a very real stake in the process of environmental protection, and should show everyone how "to manage in a way that is good for people and the environment" (Vogel, 1998: 8B).

While this conservative reaction to environmentalism supposedly resists the demolition of technological/industrial civilization, it implicitly also stands up in defense of the United States' uniquely important place in the world's economic system. Virtually no distinctions are drawn between

international environmental accords and national ecology groups by their conservative opponents. Environmentalists are all cast as anti-human and pro-nature. Indeed, as Berliner asserts, in the United States, which remains

a nation founded on the pioneer spirit, they have made 'development' an evil word. They inhibit or prohibit the development of Alaskan oil, offshore drilling, nuclear power and every other form of energy. Housing, commerce and jobs are sacrificed to spotted owls and snail darters. Medical research is sacrificed to the 'rights' of mice. Logging is sacrificed to the 'rights' of trees. No instance of the progress which brought man out of the cave is safe from the onslaught of those 'protecting' the environment from man, whom they consider a rapist and despoiler by his very essence (1998: 1E).

Sincere efforts to protect the environment, then, are deflected immediately by such critics into the register of national sovereignty, economic freedom, and personal liberty rather than remaining on the level of global crisis, ecological collapse, and imperiled biodiversity.

Once the work of environmentalism like that expressed at the Rio conference are put on this plane, anything that is done to protect biodiversity can be trivialized, overstated, or distorted as another sorry example of anti-human extremism. Plainly, there are some environmental extremists at work today, whose attention-getting rhetoric continually comes back to haunt them. Most environmentalists, however, are not extremists, and their efforts are pitched at guaranteeing the survival of human life by insuring the survival of all the nonhuman life that humans depend upon in their environment. Unfortunately, many conservatives continue to reduce all forms of environmentalism to their most

extreme expression: "Such is the naked essence of environmentalism: It mourns the death of one whale or tree, but actually welcomes the death of billions of people. A more malevolent, man-hating philosophy is unimaginable" (Berliner, 1998: 2E).

V. Conclusions: Rough Road Ahead

The United States does not always carry its responsibilities as a world superpower easily or effectively. On the one hand, it must accept, because it professes to believe in democracy, consensus, and law, the contradictory dictates embedded in clusters of environmental agreements. They have been negotiated, when all is said and done, by the world's governments as meaningful and valuable understandings. On the other hand, it also can ignore, because it possesses the wealth, power, and technology, the weak constraints created by these agreements inasmuch as they limit America's sovereign authority and economic growth. Indeed, during the triumphalist 1990s, the citizens of the United States virtually see this as the special prerogative of American superpower.

Ultimately, Buchanan and other patriotic Americans who buy into his sort of economic nationalism explicitly repudiate the position espoused by Maurice Strong at the Rio summit: "No one place can remain an island of affluence in a sea of misery. We're either going to save the whole world or no one will be saved" (cited in Weisskopf and Preston, 1992: A20). Instead, the right-wing reaction to the Earth Summit pushes Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration all the way to its nationalist conclusion: "Human

beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life" ("Draft of Environmental Rules: 'Global Partnership,' 1992: 10"). Human beings must be front and center, but they also should be first and foremost American human beings. Thus, environmental regulations are great as long as they apply to everyone else, but not to Americans.

These intense nationalist reactions to the Earth Summit in the United States add a distressing quality to post-Cold War politics. They also are unlikely to fade anytime in the near future. Accepting costly structures of national economic disadvantage in order to support larger geopolitical strategic goals, which was quite common during the Cold War, is no longer an automatic feature of bipartisan politics in the U.S. What were tactics for preventing communist expansion via a very biased system of privileged international exchange now are seen by antiglobal nationalists as examples of parasitical free-riding at America's expense. Because globalized environmental treaties will cost Americans their jobs, they must be rejected by the ruling elites in Washington as well as many mass publics beyond the beltway out in the country.

More liberal observers may discount these right-wing reactions as the passing signs of a temporary fringe movement of extremists which really poses no serious threat to the emergent transnational regime on the environment. This analysis is wishful thinking. The sources of this right-wing reaction have been building for a generation, and the greater geopolitical

forces that once kept them at bay now have changed decisively. Private property based conservation has a large growing constituency in the U.S., but public regulatory intervention in the name of abstract transnational ecologies increasingly is regarded as an economic fifth column dedicated to destroying the United States from within. Public spirited environmental activists no longer dominate political discourses about ecology in the way they once did thirty years ago. Unless and until, those discursive battles are refought and won in the U.S., economic nationalists, conservative populists, and xenophobic isolationists will block the effectiveness of any new ecological initiatives from international conferences like the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

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