

The Final Straw

Environmental Mind-Conditioning

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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Progressives. I have just got to shake my head in wonder at progressives. They are always doing something, and it's usually something they think is a grand solution to a problem. "Raising awareness"—you hear that term a lot. "Raising awareness of the plight of the environment," and in the end it turns out to be little more than a meaningless gesture, even—in some cases—counterproductive to what they are actually trying to do.

For instance, not long ago, electric vehicles were touted to be the solution to fossil fuel powered automobiles and the pollution that they cause. So far, in the ten years or so since they have really come into production, few people like them, few people buy them and the manufacturing process still produces more pollution overall than the internal combustion vehicle production.

Oh well. A big failure, right? No, not at all! Not to them—results *don't matter*. What matters is the turning of the public's consciousness toward alternative fuels and environmental concerns.

Liberals come up with these crises and stunts less to solve specific environmental problems than to change thinking, and therefore to change behavior. In other words—I try to put it even more bluntly—the American public (and frankly, we could say the worldwide public) is being brainwashed. The "good" word for it these days is "conditioned." You are being conditioned and coerced—that is, forced to change the way we conduct our lives. They are attempting to make us think and act as they do. They want us to be one with them in everything that they do. Folks, it's politics, plain and simple. They are trying to get people—Americans; in this country—to vote the way they do. That's why they do things like they just have done over the past few months.

The latest gimmick is the banning of plastic drinking straws. Seattle, Washington was the first American major city to do so, fining restaurants, coffee houses and other retail outlets for offering plastic straws to patrons. So if you want to go in somewhere and get a Coke or a frappuccino or whatever it is that you like that uses a straw, you're not going to get one—not in Seattle. You'll have to bring your own, or they will offer you something like what they call "compostable options," like a paper straw, or a reusable option, like a straw made of metal or some other material that can go through a Hobart machine (a

dishwasher).

Santa Barbara, California, goes one step beyond Seattle. They are now adding jail time to the list of punishments, even for as little as *one* straw—one measly straw. Many other progressive cities, like New York City, are considering such bans. The last I heard it was about fifteen different U.S. cities, and several municipalities already have them in one way or another.

This isn't only an American problem. Vancouver, British Columbia, is going even further ridding itself of plastic takeaway items such as straws, coffee cups, drink stirrers and lids. The city's goal is to move to a British-style distribution ban on non-compostable straws and utensils by 2025. Why is the city government of Vancouver, British Columbia doing this? "When they become litter, straws and utensils can be ingested and harm turtles, birds and other sea life." So they are looking out in the ocean and saying, "All these creatures out there are going to die."

Britain, by the way, has (or will have) a total ban on the distribution of plastic straws, sticks and plastic cotton swabs (Q Tips). Britain's environmental minister says, "Single use plastics are a scourge on our seas and lethal to the precious environment and wildlife, so it is vital we act now."

This sounds dire, doesn't it? When we hear statistics like this one from the National Wildlife Service, that Americans use half a billion plastic straws each day, and this one from the Euro Monitor International, that the world uses or produces 300 million metric tons of plastic each year (equaling 88 pounds of plastic per person per year), the problem seems almost insurmountable. How is banning plastic drinking straws going to help? The answer is (drum roll please): It won't. Or, if it does, the contribution will be minuscule. Or, as we saw in another example, it will be counterproductive.

Starbucks is leading the charge to the left all over this country and around the world. Starbucks is banning plastic straws in favor of a lid that looks like a toddler's sippy cup. They want to make us all into little babies, it seems, going around drinking our little sippy cups of coffee or cold coffee or tea. This trading of the straw for the lid may sound great, until you realize that the lid made of the same kind of #5 plastic—#5 plastic, by the way, is a kind of plastic that does not recycle well, and a lot of cities and countries are actually saying they are no longer going to accept it as a recyclable material. Anyway, the lid made of the same kind of #5 plastic contains more plastic than the straw that it's replacing.

I have seen various statistics on how big a part plastic straws play into the plastic

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pollution problem. These statistics range from as little as 0.2%—that is, straws make up 0.2% of plastic litter—to as much as a little under 4%. So the range is between 0.2% and about 4% (3.8%). I tend to think it's a little bit more toward the lower figure of 0.2% rather than 4%. I say this with a little bit of experience.

If you remember twenty or thirty years ago, when the liberals were telling us how many homosexuals there were in America, they said, "Oh, it is 10% and over." That figure got out there, and it was said in newscasts and newspaper articles throughout during the AIDS crisis and all, that 10% of the population is homosexual. But when they actually took statistical surveys of this sort of thing, it ended up at about 1-2%, so they are always overhyping these things.

But let me get back to this—why do I think it's on the lower end of things? Every two years Toronto, Canada performs a scientifically rigorous audit on street litter in the city. The auditors mark out three hundred plots, and they meticulously count every little bit of litter that they find in those plots. In 2016, under the small litter category, the surveyor found 900 pieces of chewing gum, 800 cigarette butts, 734 pieces of paper, and a grand total—let's have the drum roll again—of **four** straws. These straws, if you do the math constitute, 0.1% of total urban litter. And I would imagine that Toronto is pretty representative of a large city.

What's more, the 2014 study found not four, but **ten**, plastic straws, suggesting that between 2014 and 2016, the straw problem has been improving. We're actually getting better; it went down by more than half. Americans, Britons and Canadians sipping sodas from straws are not the problem.

Environmentalists see a growing island of garbage in the Pacific Ocean that has been dubbed "the great Pacific garbage patch." There is actually several of them in the oceans around the world. This great Pacific garbage patch is twice the size of Texas and it's nine feet deep. It sits between California and Hawaii, and there is another one that's over on the Western side of the Pacific as well. Seeing this, the environmentalists scream about plastic pollution and our moral obligation to reduce our use of plastics, to change our lifestyles, for the life of these sea creatures. Remember "save the whales" It's still going on, except they've changed it to this sort of thing.

It is a problem. The great Pacific garbage patch is real. But is the great Pacific garbage patch made up of plastic straws? No. Indeed, no. A report from a recent survey found 46% of it—of this great Pacific garbage patch—was discarded fishing nets. A further substantial portion is related fishing industry gear like floats, ropes, traps, baskets and crates. Another 20% is junk that was washed away from the Japan mainland during the

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2011 tsunami that they had there.

In this survey that they did, that was very scientifically rigorous, do you know how many straws they found? Zero. No straws in the great Pacific garbage patch.

It appears that the real culprits are industrial fishing fleets on the other side of the globe. A 2017 report found that China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam are responsible for more plastic in the oceans than the rest of the world combined.

We *should* reduce our consumption of plastics. But let's be rational about it. In no way are we helping to solve this problem by invoking governmental force to ban the use of plastic drinking straws. I wish this ridiculous notion would be the final straw that turns the tide against the progressive onslaught on our values and freedoms.