

This crime bill won't stop crime

by Carl J. Osgood

"We do need a new crime bill," said Democratic presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche in an interview on Aug. 17, "but the one we have is a stinker."

On Aug. 25, after a long and acrimonious fight in both houses of Congress, the U.S. Senate passed the 1994 Crime Bill, with a \$30 billion price tag, by a vote of 61-38. Six Republicans crossed the aisle to vote with 55 Democrats. The bill had already passed the House of Representatives during a rare Sunday session on Aug. 21.

The crime bill does several things that are politically popular these days, although not everything that the Congress wanted. It greatly expands the use of the death penalty at the federal level, for at least 24 listed crimes, including for premeditated murder, any violent crime resulting in death such as kidnapping or carjacking, and sexual abuse resulting in death. The strict limitations on death row appeals that the Republicans have been demanding to bring "finality" to the death penalty process, did not make it into the version of the bill that made its way out of the conference committee.

Other provisions include funding for the construction of new prisons and community policing, and the much-ballyhooed "100,000 new police officers" provision—although it is doubtful that \$8.8 billion in funding is enough to put that many new officers on the streets.

This draconian bill will be paid for by the money saved by a combination of attrition and layoffs of 25,000 federal employees.

The real issues are avoided

In his remarks before the bill's passage, LaRouche said he did not think of it particularly as Clinton's crime bill. "I think it's a package which took on a life of its own, which the presidency signed on to, as a matter of putting what it regarded as the less crucial issues off the table, in order to proceed with those it considered more crucial, such as the health care bill."

LaRouche stressed that the real issues, the causes of crime, are in no way addressed by the draconian measures called for in the bill. "Except for die-hards like me (and there are more and more of them around the political scene in the United States these days), people have been absolutely afraid to touch this crime panic.

"We've had people around the country who have run as states' Attorneys General for re-election, on the basis of their

bloody-handed record in executions, and who promised to make more, and who have carried out that promise." In Virginia, LaRouche pointed out, Gov. George Allen "has a couple of criminals there himself, [William] Barr and [Henry] Hudson, whose dirty record is clear—we've got them on the federal record, as to what they did. They're advising him to go ahead with this hardline policy for Virginia, which may crack the Virginia budget, and cause all kinds of problems." Barr and Hudson both played major roles in the unjust 1988 railroad conviction of Lyndon LaRouche and associates—Barr as Attorney General in the Bush administration, and Hudson as the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, who prosecuted LaRouche.

There are a lot of people who know the Crime Bill is "rotten, who know it's stupid," LaRouche continued. "They're afraid to come out and fight it openly. Others sign on to it, hoping that they can get it out of the way, feeling they couldn't stop it (as, I think, the presidency's reaction probably was)."

A legislative wrangle

The conference report on the bill had originally been killed in a procedural vote on Aug. 11, which kept it from coming to the floor of the House for debate and a vote. It then went back into conference committee for changes that would increase the chances of the bill passing in the House. Most of the changes occurred in the area of funding: The total amounts authorized were reduced by about \$3 billion, from the \$33.2 billion contained in the original conference report. The most controversial aspects of the bill, however, the ban on assault weapons and the deletion of the racial justice provisions on the death penalty, were not changed by the conference.

The funding cuts were made in order to placate the Republicans, who had successfully killed the bill on Aug. 11 by focusing their attacks on the amount of "pork" in the bill. Rep. Bill Barrett (R-Neb.) said that "it includes too much spending for so-called prevention programs, and it offers too little toward keeping criminals off the streets." House Minority Whip Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) added, during the Aug. 21 debate, "We are not against prevention. We just think that prevention done by the federal government . . . has not worked." The Republicans failed to offer any preventive measures that would work, sticking with the politically popular "lock 'em up and throw away the key" approach.

The entire debate, which began with the introduction of Democratic and Republican crime bills last summer, has been driven by the public hysteria over the very real, and growing, crime problem. The United States already has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, combined with the highest crime rate. This bill will put even more people in prison, destroying any prospect for the rehabilitation of prisoners, while doing nothing to address the economic and cultural collapse that has created the explosion of crime in the first place.