

Finally, a Bering Strait Tunnel?

May 17—The inclusion of the Bering Strait Tunnel in an outline of China’s plans for global rail development in the state-run *Beijing Times* on May 8 has again put that long-standing project on the international agenda. U.S. rail expert Hal Cooper, who has been a long-term advocate of the project, told Ria Novosti in the wake of that announcement that the Chinese action means that the project “will never be swept under the rug again.”

The proposal for a rail link from Siberia to Alaska across the Bering Strait has been mooted since the time of Abraham Lincoln (see *EIR*, May 2, 2007), but the idea went through a renaissance beginning with the work of the Schiller Institute in the early 1990s, when Helga Zepp-LaRouche and Lyndon LaRouche embarked on their campaign for a World Land-Bridge of development corridors. Both LaRouches have conceived of the project both as a spur to global economic development and a means of war avoidance through cooperation among key nations such as the United States, Russia, and China, all of which are needed to realize such a project.

2007 Nodal Point

2007 was a breakthrough year for the project, featuring a number of high-profile conferences and decisions that spotlighted the tunnel project.

At an April 10 meeting on rail transport, chaired by President Vladimir Putin, Vladimir Yakunin, head of the state-owned company Russian Railways, laid out construction of the 3,500-km rail line from the right bank of the Lena River to the Bering Strait, as a significant task. That line would later be included as one of strategic importance for the future, in the Russian Railways Strategy for Rail Development in the Russian Federation to 2030, published in July 2007.

Russian proponents of the Bering Strait project conducted a publicity drive around an April 23 conference titled “Megaprojects of Russia’s East: Intercontinental Eurasia-America Link via the Bering Strait.” This was organized by the Council for the Study of Productive Forces (SOPS), a joint institution of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian government’s Eco-

nomics Ministry (MERT). Co-sponsors were the Economics Ministry itself, the Russian Ministry of Transport, Russian Railways, and several regional governments in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

On April 16, the late Academician Alexander Granberg, then head of the SOPS, explained in an interview how the project fit into the Russian leadership's vision of the development of transportation infrastructure as essential for uplifting Russia's huge outlying regions.

Then on April 18, at a pre-event press conference held by the SOPS project working group, SOPS Vice-Chairman Victor Razbegin, also of the MERT Industrial Research department, grabbed headlines in the Russian media with his huge map of the proposed \$65 billion multi-modal Bering Strait tunnel from Russia to Alaska, with its associated long-distance rail and power lines.

At the conference itself, high-level Russian participants were joined by speakers from South Korea, Japan, and the United States.

In the opening session, two American contributions put forward the idea that great development projects are the path, leading away from war. These were the remarks by the late Governor of Alaska and U.S. Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel, a strong backer of the Bering Strait tunnel project; and Lyndon LaRouche's article, "The World's Political Map Changes: Mendeleev Would Have Agreed." The article by LaRouche, requested by conference organizers for publication in connection with the event, was read to the meeting.

Granberg told the conference that the next step would be design and feasibility studies for the 6,000-km rail-road-pipeline-power corridor from Yakutsk in Eastern Siberia to Fort Nelson, Canada, including a 100-km tunnel under the Bering Strait.

At the end of the conference, April 25, the participants issued an "Appeal from the participants of the international conference on an Intercontinental Eurasia-America Transport Link via the Bering Strait, to the heads of state and governments of Russia, the U.S.A., Canada, South Korea, Japan, China, and the EU member-states." Along with the Appeal, the participants at the April Moscow conference sent a draft Memorandum of Cooperation, proposing that those nations endorse the project and consider financing feasibility studies for the Bering Strait project at the June 6-8, 2007 G-8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany. The studies, they said, could have been completed by 2010.

Global Support

While the issue was not known to have been taken up at the G-8 summit, high-profile organizing continued. Among the highlights was the Schiller Institute's Sept. 15 conference in Kiedrich, Germany, which in addition to the LaRouches, featured speakers from around the world, including an impressive delegation of Russian scholars and political leaders.

Among them were Prof. Stanislav Menshikov of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Razbegin; and Dr. Sergei Cherkasov and Academician Dmitri Rundqvist, both of the Vernadsky State Geological Museum; and Hal Cooper. The prospects for the Bering Strait rail tunnel as part of the global land-bridge were highlighted.

The Russians have also kept the project on the radar screen, although the global financial crisis and the geopolitics in the West have erected major barriers to it being able to go ahead. The Russians again attempted to place the project on the international agenda, at the November 2010 G20 summit in South Korea. Russian Federation Council member Aslambek Aslakhanov, formerly an advisor to President Putin, told Novosti of the critical role of this project for the industrial development of *the entire region*, by linking four continents.

Also in 2010, the Chinese interest in the project was demonstrated when the Grand Prize for innovation at the Shanghai World Expo-2010 went to the Bering Strait Tunnel project, submitted by Russia's SOPS. Razbegin was on hand to receive the award for this "intercontinental multimodal transport tunnel" design.

New Prospects

China's renewed public attention to the Bering Strait project has come virtually on the eve of Putin's May 20-21, 2014 visit to Beijing, where new levels of economic cooperation are expected to be discussed, and certain agreements, such as on natural gas, which have been under negotiation for some time, are expected to be consolidated.

Will these two leaders of the Eurasian world, who have been pursuing high-technology economic development, in stark contrast to the United States and Western Europe, take the occasion to publicly offer to the U.S., and others, cooperation on the Bering Strait mega-project? Given the utterly bankrupt condition of the trans-Atlantic system, the time for such a renewed offer is more than right.