

Max Londoño: Build The Metro to China!

We publish below the presentation given by Maximiliano Londoño, President of the Lyndon LaRouche Association of Colombia, before a December 6, 2007 forum in Bogotá, entitled “the Bogotá Metro, an Unpostponable Challenge.” Held in the Elliptical Room of the National Congress, and transmitted nationwide by the Congress’s TV station, the forum occurred just weeks after the October electoral victory of Samuel Moreno as Mayor of Bogotá. Development of the Metro was a central element in Moreno’s electoral platform.

Both the LaRouche Association and the LaRouche Youth Movement not only played a critical role in that victory, but also helped to shape the broader environment in which Colombian President Álvaro Uribe’s July 5 acceptance of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez’s proposal to build a regional railroad, could take place.

The LaRouche forces organized aggressively on the streets and in the universities, distributing 70,000 leaflets headlined, “Vote for the Darien Train and the Bogotá Metro.” The leaflet

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proposed that Colombians view the Metro, not just as a local project, but as a crucial link to the Eurasian Land-Bridge elaborated by LaRouche and his wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, leader of the German BÜSo (Civil Rights Solidarity) party. The Land-Bridge's extension into the Americas, the leaflet pointed out, would become possible through the tunnel under the Bering Strait that Russia is proposing to build.

In the period between Moreno's election and his taking office in January of 2008, the LaRouche Association widely circulated its Strategic Alert with such articles as "Prometheus, the Bogotá Metro and the Bolivarian Railroad," and "The Reasonable Is Possible: The Darien Train and the Bering Strait Tunnel."

In the December forum, Londoño's testimony stood out for its optimistic view of what Colombia can achieve, if its leaders abandon the Malthusian conceptions peddled by the World Bank and the IMF, and embrace the "think big" vision that Franklin Delano Roosevelt so successfully applied in the 1930s United States, and that the Eurasian Land-Bridge embodies today. Londoño has incorporated these programmatic proposals into every campaign he has waged in Colombia, dating back to 2002 when he ran for Congress on the electoral slate of Presidential candidate Gen. Harold Bedoya.

General Bedoya, former head of his country's Armed Forces, used the 2002 campaign, as he did in earlier campaigns for the Presidency, to propose a Marshall Plan-style of national reconstruction program for Colombia, one that would also include close cooperation with the United States in dealing with the narcoterrorism that plagued the nation. Bedoya expanded on those proposals during a joint press conference with Lyndon LaRouche, held in February 2000, in Washington, D.C.

'Crazy' Ideas

I don't have the highly developed ability of Dr. Paul Bromberg [the former Mayor of Bogotá] to think small. We have to think big. We have to conceptualize things and do them—make possible what is reasonable, and push demagoguery aside. We are at the best possible moment to build not only the Metro, but an entire integrated network of rail corridors to connect the country with the rest of the region and the world.

Look at what's happening. In April, the Russians announced they were going to build a tunnel under the Bering Strait. That's crazy, right? It's 110 kilometers! But it means



Maximiliano Londoño

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that you could start from any European capital, and after traveling across Europe, go 10,000 km on the Trans-Siberian Railroad and reach the Americas. This is the topic of conversation right now in Canada, Russia, and in the United States. And we also have to take it up.

The only other significant problem for those railroad corridors would be the so-called Darien Gap, which, from now on, should be called the Darien Train. The railroad that was being discussed in 1890 was never built because people, like Dr. Bromberg, weren't thinking big. He says that we poor people can't think big. But we *have* to think big. For example, right now, in Italy, there is discussion of building a tunnel under the Mediterranean. Listen carefully: 164 km to connect Sicily with Tunisia, and they're going to build four artificial

islands with the left-over refuse.

Wow, that's crazy! Demented! Just as demented as President Kennedy was when he said, "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth." Now, what do those programs mean? Breaking with existing paradigms—breaking with the "limits to growth." The meaning of going to the Moon wasn't that we brought back some rocks and used them for minerals. The key was the advancement in science and technology.

So, society advances with new principles. Right now, specifically in the case of Bogotá, introducing the Metro, a system that isn't just about transportation, will allow us to reorganize everything. That's how societies work, on the basis of new principles.

At any given moment, seeing something in context is useful, but we can't just stay there. There are several things that are clear right now. If we're going to have a Metro, what will it be like? Well, we have to think of what it will be like 50 or 100 years from now. People work in surrounding areas, so of course, we're going to have to connect them through rail corridors, but with wide-gauge electric trains. We're talking about locomotives with electric traction, like the European ones.

What's wrong with our political leaders? They travel and see progress in the United States and in Europe, but what do they bring back? Small things! A return to the cavemen! In Europe, you can travel at speeds of 300-350 km an hour, on trains with electric traction, not diesel electric, but entirely electric traction. Why can't we do the same thing here?

One of the problems is financing. Let's look at what the United States has done. They are our friends. They've helped orient us, sometimes in the wrong direction, as we know. But the World Bank report that Dr. Bromberg so favorably discussed, tells us we can't build infrastructure, and much less, rail corridors. The Bank said in 2005 that infrastructure was only acceptable in the area of highways, and then, only through privatizations, through concessions. Anything else is impossible.

Think Big!

We have to think big. In 1956-57, President Eisenhower decided to build a federal highway system, for reasons of security. How did they do it? They made a decision to have a parallel budget for capital investment. Of course, if we look at our current budget, there just isn't any money. The minister has been told there's no money. They gave him a hard time over building just 2,500 km of highways. So now he's a little bit scared and doesn't want to discuss this.

Now we want him to be our commander of the Metro, and of the railroads too. He has profound theological conceptions and knows that faith moves the physical. Human beings think, conceptualize, imagine, dream—that's what moves us, not the little things.

Of course, we have to make ideas become reality. Let's look at the budget issue, a capital investment budget, because we're talking about long-term investment. We're going to need \$2.3 billion for the Metro, and they tell us: "Horrible! You're going to take food out of the mouths of the poor. You're not going to be able to build the bridges."

No! What did Eisenhower do? At that time, they were talking about a \$100 billion budget, but it was to be extended over 33 years. They imposed a two-cent federal tax per gallon of gasoline which was used to cover the amortization of bonds, issued to attract private capital to finance a public project.

They took as their model what Franklin Delano Roosevelt did in 1933. He took office with the economy paralyzed. [The government] had followed Wall Street's rules: First finance the debt—but then there's nothing left over for investment. He said, very simply, we have to put people to work; there's no place else to cut. So what did he do? The State built infrastructure projects. He used a financing corporation that Herbert Hoover had set up to save the banks, and then empowered it to issue bonds.

Here in Bogotá, we need a district corporation that can issue bonds to be capitalized. That way, we can ensure that savings, of any kind, can be part of this process. There were a number of different processes that came together in what Eisenhower did. He said, we're going to issue bonds, because debt is an instrument for generating wealth. Money in itself isn't wealth. Credit is an instrument to activate people who have organizational and administrative abilities, who have ideas and can mobilize others to create tangible wealth.

Credit can also become an instrument of usury. Right now,

we have the best conditions to effect change. Take the Bank of the South, for example, which is being discussed because the need for a new international financial architecture is being posed, and former Argentine President Néstor Kirchner and Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa understand this.

Look at what Argentina is doing. It abandoned orthodoxy, and now they're building a bullet train, the kind that travels at 350 km an hour, between Buenos Aires and Rosario, and they're going to build another one. The Chinese are building railroads, including magnetic levitation. So, here in the District of Bogotá, we can build the Metro and many other things.

The FDR Model

We can do what Franklin Delano Roosevelt did in 1933. People were downtrodden and he said: How can we employ them? So they began to build infrastructure projects, and in the first three months of his term, 4 million were put to work. Doing what? They weren't mowing the lawn or sweeping the streets. They built railroads, highways, canals, airports, etc. And, just as a reference point, remember that when Gen. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla was President, he invited David Lilienthal to Colombia.

Lilienthal was the head of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the largest water management project ever seen by mankind. It extended over seven states, and took care of the region's flooding problems. The TVA built more than 20 dams, not to mention all the other projects. Rojas invited Lilienthal to come up with a proposal for our country, and [Lilienthal] said that the Cauca River Valley and the Sinú River Valley should be the pioneers, to do there what the TVA did in the U.S.

This was Rojas's real program, and through it, he built 18 airports, besides Bogotá's El Dorado airport. After him, President Alberto Lleras sold the land that Rojas had bought for these projects. Rojas was a visionary; he built what infrastructure we have, and now we have to take the next step.

We know for sure that we need the Bogotá Metro, connected to a train for the surrounding Sábana, which will go beyond the existing one. We also need rail corridors nationwide. How can we solve our problems with Venezuela? It has a plan for a train to reach Arauca. So why don't we have a train that will go through Arauca, Casanare, Meta, Caquetá, and Putumayo, and ends up in Ecuador? Of course, then, we'll have our Gran Colombia¹—we'll have it physically, integrating ourselves through rail corridors.

What the Russians have proposed, to link up the Eurasian Land-Bridge—this is the name for the network of rail and development corridors—with the corridors of the Americas, is a higher-level principle that completely changes the planet. Now we, with the Metro idea, which is a metaphor, an infinity

1. Historically, Gran Colombia included present-day Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador.

tesimal of this new geometry, have to hook up with this.

There are several things we can do. The Bank of the South is an instrument to create credit. We can create a district financing corporation, which, as I mentioned earlier, will be able to issue bonds. Even if it's public, it won't depend on the regular budget, so that we won't hear from the finance minister later on that "there's no money." So, we have a number of options right now.

As LaRouche says—he's the American statesman who's organizing inside the Democratic Party—we have to get rid of this obsolete financial system. Debt is growing faster than nations' revenues. Even the United States has been hurt by this. Last year, 65 auto factories shut down, and the U.S. aerospace sector has been dismantled.

There's also a fight going on inside the Democratic Party to steer it in a different direction. There's a debate about these rail corridors. I want to say that it is possible to have here something like what Franklin Delano Roosevelt did in 1933, which was known as the New Deal. He said: We're going to put people to work on infrastructure projects. So, let's start with the Metro, then continue with the Cundinamarca train, and the surrounding areas, and build the rail corridors. And, Mr. Minister, to give you a few more problems, wed yourself to the Metro! Let the President wed himself to this project! Wed yourself to the railroad. We need it.

Thank you very much.