

LaRouche: Putin Is Right To Protect Russia's Food Supply

by EIR Staff

Aug. 8—In the wake of British criticism of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's decision to halt Russian wheat, barley, and other grain exports, in the face of a drought and fire emergency, Lyndon LaRouche has stated his full support for Putin's policy, according to a LaRouche PAC release issued yesterday. Putin had no choice but to act to protect the food supply of the Russian people, LaRouche said, and it would have been wrong for him not to do it.

LaRouche elaborated on the contributing causes to the crisis, as well as the solution, which involves the immediate launch of discussions and collaboration between the United States and Russia on the North American Water and Power Alliance (NAWAPA; see article in this issue, p. 4).

LaRouche noted that the current problem leading to the reduction of the Russian wheat crop, largely by drought, could have been avoided, if the British, starting with the Margaret Thatcher regime, had not imposed such destructive policies on Russia, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Back in 1988, LaRouche explained, he personally had launched a Food for Peace policy, under which he envisioned cooperation between the United States and Russia in solving the then-chronic food supply problem in the Soviet Union and its allies in Eastern Europe. LaRouche proposed that the United States provide technological assistance to deal with the developing hu-

manitarian crisis at the time. This policy would have built trust and economic prosperity.

At that time, the first Bush Administration, along with Thatcher and French President François Mitterrand, sabotaged LaRouche's initiative, and instead subjected the former Soviet Union to genocidal IMF conditionalities, which have prevented Russia from using its historical scientific capabilities to develop the necessary infrastructure for productive agriculture, that could withstand extraordinary weather problems like those today. The British agents who carried out those crimes still control parts of Russian policy.

Fires Show Infrastructure Need

Russia is in the midst of a Summer wildfire crisis on a scale not seen since 1972. Weeks of temperatures above 90°F, with no rain, have turned forests, peat bogs, and abandoned farmland throughout central European Russia and the Volga River basin into a giant tinderbox.

At an emergency conference Aug. 2, Prime Minister Putin said that hundreds of new fires were breaking out each day in the parched forests and bogs. As of Aug. 5, there were 520 fires burning, and Russia's national weather service forecast no significant let-up in the record heat wave until after Aug. 20. Residents of Moscow have been warned to stay indoors with the windows down, as a thick pall of smog from burning



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Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (second from left) inspects the fires in Voronezh District on Aug. 4. Two decades of disinvestment in vital infrastructure included elimination of the Federal Forest Service, and some villages lack any fire-fighting equipment whatsoever.

peat bogs hangs over the city; these drained, then later abandoned bogs were already a factor nearly 40 years ago in the fire crisis of 1972, but government programs for bog hydration ended in the post-Soviet period.

Putin has been highly visible on national TV, overseeing the response to the fires. In the last days of July, he toured the area around Nizhny Novgorod on the Volga, Russia's fourth-biggest city, where entire villages had burned. With 1.2 million acres (over 1,800 square miles) burned, seven of Russia's central and Volga provinces were in a state of emergency at the beginning of August. The death toll has passed 50, as thousands of houses burn to the ground.

After two decades of disinvestment in vital infrastructure in Russia's hinterland, some villages are without any fire-fighting equipment whatsoever. Inhabitants try to fight the fires alone, shovelling earth by hand.

It is this collapse of Russia's rural economy and forest maintenance, not weather or alleged climate change, which has made the fires so terrible, a Russian Academy of Sciences environmental protection expert told Itar-Tass Aug. 6. "The fires, material damage, and casualties during the hot Summer of 2010 are the first serious alarm call," said Arkadi Tishkov, deputy director of the Academy's Institute of Geography. "One must respond correctly, without finding excuses in climate anomalies."

The orgy of privatization and financial speculation in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991,

left much of the rural economy to rot. With the population shrinking by nearly 10 million, the 2002 census showed that almost *one-third* of Russia's 155,000 villages had ceased to be functional communities. Some 13,000 villages had been abandoned altogether, and another 35,000 were inhabited by ten or fewer people, all of them retirees who are unable to maintain the land.

Tishkov estimated that 95% of the fires resulted from the rural collapse. The heat has been abnormal this Summer, he said, "but the fires we have seen were mostly man-made ones." Fires, he said, "are quite natural in a situation where vast expanses of European Russia are currently overgrown with weeds, where there are abandoned grasslands and pastures, which are pretty close to villages and towns. Hay fields and pastures accumulate huge reserves of dry grass. It is only a matter of time before they go up in flames."

As for the abandoned peat bogs, Tishkov said, "The systems of artificial control of water levels in peatlands in the Moscow, Tver, Ryazan, and Vladimir regions are in ruins, and this does not allow rapid irrigation of burning peat," he told Itar-Tass. The result is persistent underground fires.

No less important than the heat wave, Tishkov emphasized, was the elimination of the Federal Forest Service as an independent agency in 2000, and the new Forest Code of 2007, under which companies holding economic use leases on forests are responsible for fire control, rather than the government. "This has eliminated entire sectors of the economy—forestries, the state forest protection, and so on," Tishkov said. He called for restoration of the Forest Service and other measures to restore national management of rural Russia.

What Kind of Modernization?

Putin's answer to a Russian blogger cast a spotlight on the contrast between the core infrastructure deficit in Russia, and the current campaign—steered by the privatizer London loves most, Anatoli Chubais—to pursue economic "modernization" chiefly in terms of the IT sector and other marketable technologies. This happened when Putin chose to reply publicly to a posting by a LiveJournal blogger in Tver, forwarded to him by liberal radio editor Alexei Venediktov.

FIGURE 1

The Eurasian Land-Bridge: Proposed Links to a Worldwide Rail Network



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LaRouche stressed that implementation of NAWAPA would open the way toward realizing the Bering Strait rail-tunnel project, linking the Americas with Eurasia. The Russians have long been seeking U.S. cooperation in that project.

The writer demanded, “Why the f**k do we need an innovation center in Skolkovo [President Dmitri Medvedev’s “Silicon Valley for Russia” project], when we don’t have basic firefighting vehicles?” The man noted that even under “the damned Communists,” his village northwest of Moscow had three ponds for emergencies, a fire alarm bell, and the services of a firetruck. Now the ponds have been filled in, the bell was replaced by a phone that doesn’t work, and there is no fire engine in the region. The writer demanded that his taxes go directly to buy a fire truck. Putin, who has never answered a blog before, replied that he agreed with the criticism “in general,” praised the blogger’s writing style, and promised a fire bell.

The start of high-speed train service on the 255-mile Moscow-Nizhny Novgorod line went ahead July 30, even though Nizhny is an epicenter of the fires. Nizhny Novgorod regional Gov. Valeri Shantsev was unable to attend the ceremony, presided over by Russian Railways President Vladimir Yakunin, since he was at a

conference with Putin and Minister of Emergency Situations Sergei Shoigu in Vyksunsk District, a scene of major fire damage.

Yakunin termed the high-speed Sapsan trains “a symbol of everything new and progressive ... —our country’s prudent approach to development, with an emphasis on breakthrough technology.” Along with Putin, Yakunin has been one of the Russian officials working to focus the “modernization” policy on crucial areas of infrastructure and industry, such as rail, the aviation industry, shipbuilding, and nuclear power—and not only the agenda of IT and pharmacological “market niches,” promoted by Chubais and other representatives of hard-core British monetarism.

Grain Harvest Hit

As in 1972, when the drought and crop failure were followed by massive Soviet grain imports and a sharp spike in food prices worldwide, the impact of the weather in Russia is international. Lately, Russia has

been a wheat exporter, but this year's crop forecast is turning negative quickly, as drought engulfs more than 15 regions. On Aug. 3, the Russian Agriculture Ministry cut its 2010 grain harvest projection from 85 million metric tons to the 70-75 mmt range. The 2009 harvest was 97.1 mmt, while 75 mmt is the domestic consumption level.

According to the Russian Hydrometeorological Center, the Winter wheat crop for next year is also in jeopardy, because the soil is too dry to start planting on schedule in August.

On July 29, the International Grains Council lowered its worldwide wheat forecast for the current crop (July 1, 2010-June 30, 2011) to 651 mmt, as against 677 and 686 mmt in the two preceding years. The downward revision takes into account the drought conditions in Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. Russian exports, which were nearly 22 mmt last year, were expected to drop to around 11 mmt—before Putin's government announced the export ban.

Speculators aim to make a killing on the prospects for wheat scarcity. On the Chicago Board of Trade, wheat futures prices had risen 45% by July 29, from their lowest price in June. At the beginning of August, the European wheat price jumped 8% in one day, to EU211 per ton, the biggest one-day jump in three decades. It is feared that prices could reach the levels of the 2007-08 food crisis, when wheat was at EU300 per ton.

Within Russia, food prices soared by 19% in one week, before Putin's Aug. 5 announcement of the ban on wheat and barley exports for the rest of calendar 2010. "We cannot allow an increase in domestic prices, and we need to maintain the number of cattle," said the prime minister. Russia asked its Customs Union partners, Kazakhstan and Belarus, to impose similar curbs.

The 'Food for Peace' Solution

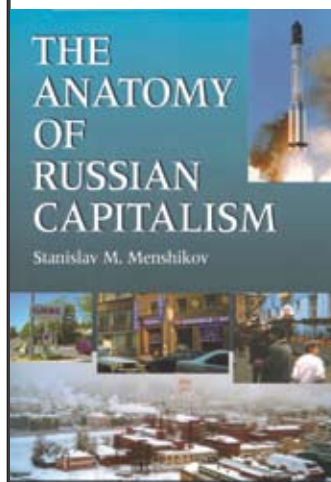
What is needed today, LaRouche concluded his Aug. 5 remarks on the action by Russia, is a policy in the spirit of his 1988 Food for Peace proposal. That is the only way to prevent the world system from continuing on its current road to Hell. And as soon as we get rid of Obama as President, we can take the necessary initiative.

That initiative is international cooperation on NAWAPA. In light of the fact that the seriousness of the Russian drought and fires is directly related to the degradation of the biosphere, including desertification, similar to that which affects the American West, the

NAWAPA project represents a model approach for Russia, and a basis for close collaboration between the United States and Russia, and then other nations as well.

We need international cooperation to ensure the security of food supplies of all nations, and the practical measures to provide that, LaRouche said. NAWAPA, a terraforming project which will open the way toward the realization of the Bering Strait Project linking the Americas and Eurasia, is a key ingredient for that.

Earlier, in an Aug. 2 discussion with colleagues, LaRouche noted that numerous Russian publications over the past decades have not only featured evaluations of NAWAPA, but have compared the scope of NAWAPA with the proposed diversion of Siberian rivers to deal with desertification in Central Asia. In light of Russian discussions of NAWAPA in the context of their own projects, LaRouche enunciated his policy that Russia should, and could, be a key partner in the adoption of NAWAPA as a model for development in numerous areas of the world, including Africa, and Central Eurasia itself.



This English translation of the work of Russia's authoritative economist, Stanislav Menshikov presents a critical analysis of the complex economic processes in Russia over the last 15 years.

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