

Kra Canal, One of LaRouche's 'Great Projects,' Is Back on the Agenda

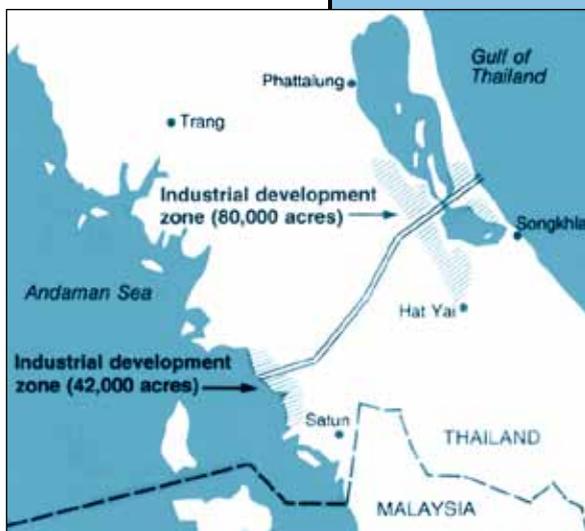
by Mike Billington

Aug. 28—Finally, the Kra Canal is back on the agenda. It has been 26 years since the demise of the plan to build a canal across the Isthmus of Kra in southern Thailand. In October 1983, *EIR* and the Fusion Energy Foundation, both founded by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., co-sponsored a conference in Bangkok with Thailand's Ministry of Transportation, proposing the construction of a sea-level Kra Canal, which would relieve the crowding in the Malacca Straits, while transforming southern Thailand into a center for growth and prosperity which would extend across Asia. A second Bangkok conference on the same theme was held a year later, in October 1984.

But the onset of globalization brought down this ambitious project, just as globalization was intended to stop infrastructure projects across the globe. Thailand's Royalist factions in the military, who ran the government at the time, chose to follow the directions of their British imperial masters, to prevent the transformation of Thailand into a modern agro-industrial nation, in favor of tourism and providing cheap Thai labor to foreign manufacturers, while the peasantry was kept in primitive conditions. The result has been retarded development, severe instability, and perpetual terrorist conflict in the South.

However, the sweeping election victory in July by Yingluck Shinawatra and her Pheu Thai party has brought the Kra Canal project back to life, along with other development projects. Yingluck is the sister of Thaksin Shinawatra, the nationalist Prime Minister who was deposed in a military coup in September

FIGURE 1
The Kra Canal



2006 by the same monarchist-military factions who had undermined the nation's transformation in the 1980s and 1990s. Although Thaksin is now in exile, under threat of imprisonment from fraudulent charges rammed through corrupt courts after the military coup, he and his supporters still enjoy the enthusiastic support of an overwhelming majority of the population, as demonstrated in his sister's election victory against the British-puppet regime imposed by the monarchy and the military.

Keystone for Development

Pakdee Tanapura, who spoke at the 1983 and 1984 Bangkok conferences, has served as chairman of the Subcommittee on International Affairs of the National Committee on the Kra Canal Project Feasibility Study. The Committee is now being reconstituted, with the support of the new government.

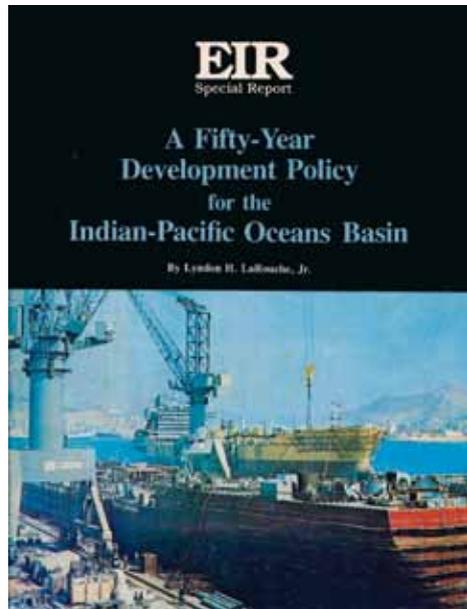
The 1984 conference, called “The Development of the Pacific and Indian Ocean Basins,” presented the Kra Canal, together with construction of new deep-water ports at either end of the canal, and industrial zones in

adjacent areas, as the hub of an Asian-wide development approach, based on projects which included development of the Mekong River basin, major water-control projects in China, and water and power projects in the Ganges-Brahmaputra region of India.

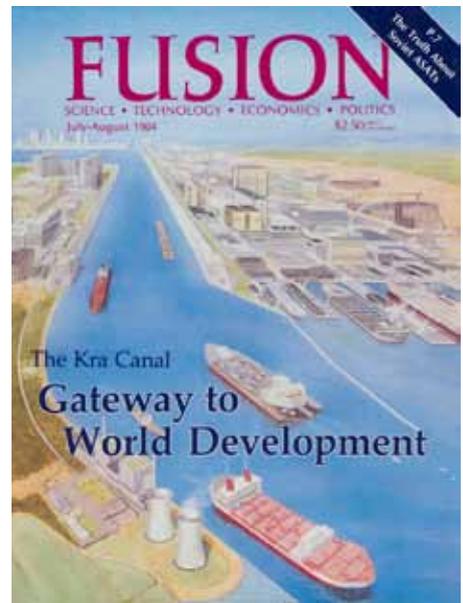
This, in turn, was part of a global “Great Projects” approach promoted by LaRouche, and also by the Global Infrastructure Fund (GIF), a body sponsored by the Mitsubishi Research Institute in Japan. The intention was to counter the already well-advanced collapse of the world economy into a “post-industrial” junk heap and doomed speculative bubble. The failure of the world to act on the development policy has brought about the current descent into global war and depression, far worse than any in modern history.

One significant change since the 1980s is the rise of China, which has shown great interest in the Kra Canal, both for the general development of the region, and to provide an alternative route for its oil shipments from the Persian Gulf, which now have to pass through the crowded and pirate-infested Strait of Malacca, a choke-point that could be manipulated by forces hostile to China.

The concept behind the Kra Canal goes far deeper than simply reducing shipping time, however. As LaRouche told the 1983 Bangkok Conference: “The prospect of establishing a sea-level waterway through the



The Fusion Energy Foundation and EIR circulated these programs for Pacific Rim development in 1983 and 1984.



Isthmus of Thailand, ought to be seen not only as an important development of basic economic infrastructure both for Thailand and the cooperating nations of the region; this proposed canal should also be seen as a keystone, around which might be constructed a healthy and balanced development of needed basic infrastructure in a more general way.”

Peace Through Development

As to the security in southern Thailand, one can still hear the argument made 26 years ago: that the Kra Canal would divide Thailand, cutting off the heavily Muslim southern provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala, thus encouraging separatists to break off the region south of this man-made barrier, from the rest of Thailand. This concern exemplifies the failure of policymakers internationally, especially in the era of “post-industrial society” propaganda from the international financial institutions, to grasp the concept presented by Pope Paul VI in his 1968 encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, which is that “the new name for peace is development.”

A report on the 1983 Bangkok Conference, published in *Fusion* magazine (July/August 1984), addressed this theme: “The canal complex, as a major industrial growth-spot, would function as an integrating and unifying factor, joining together the southern, cen-

tral, and northern provinces [of Thailand] in a large common endeavor capable of inspiring the entire nation, uplifting the economic condition of the southern population, and thus reducing the potential for dissatisfaction and dissension.”

The Kra Canal was certainly not a new idea at the time of the conferences in the 1980s. Thailand’s King Rama I in 1793 proposed a canal from Songkhla on the eastern shore, on the Gulf of Thailand, to the Indian Ocean on the western shore, just above the Malacca Strait. The concept was taken up in the 1950s, and again in the 1970s, but a combination of instability internally and in the region, due to the colonial warfare in Indochina, prevented any significant regional cooperation.

The 1983 conference marked a new beginning for the Kra Canal. Representatives from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the American engineering firm TAMS, which completed a feasibility study for the Kra Canal in 1973, travelled to Thailand to speak, and political and business leaders from Japan and India also participated. Thai Minister of Communications Samak Sundaravej opened the conference, saying that “if the Kra Canal is possible, then we should dedicate it to the world.”

Peaceful Nuclear Explosives

The length of the Kra Canal would be between 31 miles and 62 miles, depending on the route chosen for construction. The Panama Canal is 48 miles long, but the mountains on the Kra Isthmus are somewhat higher than in Panama. The potential for using peaceful nuclear explosives (PNEs) to carry out the excavations on the most difficult terrain was thus a major subject for discussion at the conferences in Bangkok.

Today, the possibility of using PNEs is completely left out of all discussions of the Kra Canal, due to the hysteria created by the enemies of development against anything nuclear. This particular form of anti-scientific brainwashing was not as extensive in 1983, and the discussion in Bangkok demonstrated the enormous advantages for Thailand and the world in using this safe, controlled form of nuclear explosive.

With PNEs, both the construction time and the cost of building the canal would be nearly cut in half. In addition, the assembly of the required advanced nuclear engineering and scientific manpower would facilitate the development of nuclear-related industries, as well

as nuclear power plants. A spokesman from Lawrence Livermore suggested that a major nuclear isotope separation plant could be constructed as part of the Kra Canal Complex of industrial centers constructed at both ends of the canal. One of the speakers at the conference was Dr. Savasti Srisuk, the former Secretary General of the Thai Office of Atomic Energy for Peace—one of the institutions remaining from the Eisenhower and Kennedy eras, when the United States still promoted Atoms for Peace.

LaRouche’s Personal Role

The extraordinary international response and participation in this process was brought about, to a great extent, by the personal initiative of LaRouche. LaRouche had authored “A Fifty-Year Development Policy for the Indian-Pacific Oceans Basin” in 1983, which circulated widely in the region, while he also toured Japan, India, and Southeast Asia. He warned that these and other Great Projects were not simply good ideas, but that without this approach, the world economy would grind down into a new dark age.

While some industrial development took place in Southeast Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s, the speculative bubble of globalization since the 1990s filled the region with hot money, and substituted processing industries for basic infrastructure development, while the Western economies were transformed into a massive gambling casino. Then George Soros and other hedge fund speculators pulled the plug on the Asian economies in the 1997-98 crash.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who served from 2001 until the 2006 coup, offered a new vision for Thailand’s future, one which countered the traditional “economic self-sufficiency” sponsored by the monarchy, in favor of modernization based on education and access to quality health care for the urban and rural poor, while offering Thailand’s economic support to its far poorer neighbors, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. With his ouster, the military/monarchist forces carried out bloody suppression of anti-government demonstrations, and nearly dragged the country into a war with Cambodia.

The new government, if it is allowed to serve without yet another military coup, has given the nation another chance to adopt the “Great Project” approach to peace and development.