

Spotlight on Bering Strait At Arctic Energy Summit

by Marcia Merry Baker and Anita Gallagher

“Even as we stand here, machines are building our part of the World Link,” declared Alexander Sergeev, member of the Executive Board of RusHydro energy company, to the Arctic Energy Summit Technology Conference held Oct. 15-18 in Anchorage, Alaska. The building of the multimodal Bering Strait Tunnel-Rail link between Russia and the United States—a project long championed by American statesman Lyndon LaRouche—was put forward as the “live” question before conference participants. It is, as well, a live question before Americans: Will the United States accept Russia’s offer to jointly build it?

The Arctic Energy Summit, organized by the Institute of the North, founded by former Alaska governor and Bering Strait tunnel promoter Walter J. Hickel, was co-sponsored by the U.S. State Department and the Arctic Council (of eight Arctic nations), and billed by its organizers as “The premier energy conference of the International Polar Year” (2007-09). Speakers included Yevgeni Velikhov, head of Russia’s Kurchatov Institute; Alexander Sergeev; George Koumal, head of the Interhemispheric Bering Strait Tunnel and Rail Group (IBSTRG); representatives of the nations that border the Arctic, including the President of Iceland, Olafur Ragnald Grimsson; Canada’s Minister of Natural Resources, Gary Lunn; U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Dan Sullivan; energy experts from the Russian Federation, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Canada; British Petroleum; the Global Infrastructure Fund Director, Nomuri Yamamoto; and many officials from Alaska, Chukotka, and Sakha. Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, and Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Ted Stevens addressed the gathering.

The idea of transforming the Earth through great projects of physical economy, and transforming the Earth’s raw materials through the most advanced technologies, as advocated by the great Russian scientist V.I. Vernadsky, was presented

with great passion by the Russian delegates. The concepts they presented broke like giant waves on the shore of the conference, and reduced other conference tracks, such as the ubiquitous “alternative energies,” to an insidious undertow; for example, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Dan Sullivan’s promotion of a United States-Brazil special deal for sugarcane biofuels.

Russians Say ‘Go Nuclear’

On the first day, Russian Academician Velikhov made a powerful case that the way to develop the Arctic is to “go nuclear.” Nuclear power in the Arctic is what’s essential, Velikhov said in his plenary session address. He told the audience that his great-grandfather had worked in shipbuilding at the giant Sevmas plant at Severodvinsk, in the Russian North, near the Arctic Circle, and that nuclear ships for ice-breaking are essential. It is also necessary, Velikhov said, to have high platforms from which to drill, and it takes a nuclear base to produce them. And, he noted, electromagnetic data is needed to find new deposits of hydrocarbons.

The Russian presentations gripped the audience because the speakers emphasized Russia’s intention to proceed with this “world link.” In a press briefing on the afternoon of Oct. 15, Velikhov, Sergeev, and Lev M. Shtilman, advisor to the governor of Chukotka, upped the ante by reporting on these developments and plans, speaking along with IBSTRG officials Koumal and Craig Burroughs:

- Academician Velikhov declared that nuclear mini-plants will play a key role in building this link. They will be produced as mobile units that can be transported to wherever they are needed by trucks, rail, or floated into position. Velikhov’s statement was fiery on the need for nuclear power, and for high-technology versions of everything.

To stress this point in his plenary speech, he used many

graphics, which are being archived at www.arcticportal.org. On Oct. 16, Velikhov explicitly addressed the “energy gap” between current world supply and worldwide demand. Sticking with the current dependence on oil, gas, and so forth, will not work; there must be nuclear power.

- Alexander Sergeyev of RusHydro, the second largest hydro-energy producer in the world, stated dramatically, “Even while we’re standing here,” there are machines at work in Russia providing hydro-electricity for the expansion of the rail lines. He announced that Oct. 19, the Bureyskaya Hydro-electric Power Station in Russia’s Far East goes operational at its full, 2,000 MW capacity, after the final testing of the dam’s sixth unit, and the upgrading of previously built sections. Sergeyev also reported on the Russian government’s Sept. 6 approval of the plan for expansion of rail lines across the nation, for the period ending 2030.

Sergeyev also announced that Russia can provide \$20 billion, or one-third, of the total funding needed for the rail line in Russia, the Bering Strait Tunnel, and 2,000 km of rail from the Seward Peninsula to British Columbia, as well as the 150 km of the tunnel itself—so, what is needed, is to find the remaining \$50 billion. George Koumal, president of the IBSTRG, announced that this \$50 billion could come from private interests, if the project gets the needed government commitment.

The local NBC-TV affiliate in Anchorage showed footage of the press conference, where it was announced that the tunnel will be drilled from both sides, and the Russian and American teams will meet in its center for a vodka toast.

The Franklin Roosevelt Precedent

In his speech on Oct. 16 on “The Role of the World Link [global rail corridor network] in the Development of Arctic Energy Resources,” Alexander Sergeyev dwelled on the legacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The Russians are studying Roosevelt, he said, because it was under his Presidency, during the 1930s Depression, when great projects were constructed—such as the Hoover Dam, and the expansion of railroads in America.

It is clear that “the ducks are being lined up” behind the Bering Strait project, which had been the subject of a high-profile conference in Moscow last April. At the Oct. 15 press conference, the speakers reported they had visited the site at Wales, Alaska, where the tunnel entrance would be.

The political and social prerequisites for the project are also underway. The IBSTRG is committed to promoting more high-level dialogue, and also intends to formulate a “compact” that could be signed by Russia, the U.S.A., and Canada.

Besides the “deep interest” shown by U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Ak.), and the U.S. State Department, which the IBSTRG press release reports, it also announced that the project is supported by Gov. Sarah Palin (R-Ak.), and Denise Michels, the Mayor of Nome (the city closest to the tunnel site). The release also announced that discussions had been held

with the administration of the village of Wales, the Alaskan entry-exit point, and representatives of the Alaska Native Corporation, and that “the native people have supported the idea of creating the Bering Strait Tunnel, which will contribute to the region’s economic growth, and create more workplaces.”

On Oct. 16, *EIR* Economics intelligence director Marcia Merry Baker asked Koumal how the current world financial crash might affect the prospects for financing the Bering Strait project, and noted Lyndon LaRouche’s long-standing support for this project, as well as LaRouche’s ongoing efforts to prevent the collapse from stopping necessary “Great Projects” like this one. Koumal responded that the economy needs “something that matters” to hold itself up, and that the economy could collapse if overloaded with “please ourselves” kinds of activities. The statement reflected the moral idea of mankind’s role in continuing the Creator’s work, by making and applying scientific discoveries for progress.

At a Bering Strait tunnel presentation the next day, a youth asked Koumal how long it would take to build the entire World Link, from the tip of South America to the tip of Africa. Someone who had worked on the Chunnel (the tunnel under the English Channel, connecting England and France), said that it took five years in total, and that it was a more difficult undertaking. Koumal, in response to another question, came out for magnetically levitated trains in population-dense areas.

In an interview with *EIR*, a Russian energy expert from Chukotka described the drop in the province’s population, from 100,000 to 60,000 over the last decades, but now the commitment is to expand the economy and living standards and the rail and tunnel. There is a plan to place a floating nuclear plant in Chaun Bay with a deadline of 2012, which will be the second one, after the first is placed in the European Arctic.

‘Why War? Why Not Big Projects?’

Former Alaska Gov. Walter Hickel continued the powerful theme of optimism in his address to the Oct. 17 Awards Banquet of the Summit. Hickel told the 200-person audience, “We can work together on great projects.” There is a lot of talk at the United Nations, but to put it straightforwardly, “To build a new world, we must build it. . . .” He posed the question, “Why war? Why not big projects? . . . The price of freedom must be sweat, not blood. . . . In some quarters, big projects are not politically correct. . . . But if God didn’t like the world, he wouldn’t have created the universe.” Hickel then presented the audience with five “Great Projects”: A global energy program to provide electricity to the 2 billion people who today lack it; the Bering Strait Project, of which he said, “That tunnel will happen!”; the opening of the Northern Sea Route, which, he said, could be the new Panama Canal; a solution to the global water crisis, built on harnessing the water from seven of the world’s largest rivers that run northward; and to “harvest the energy of the North,” rather than lock it up.

EIR will provide full coverage of this conference in November.