

LaRouche Reps Address Mahathir Conference

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The gathering in Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, on Aug. 1-3, dedicated to the achievements and policies of former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, assumed a special importance because of the fact that it occurred in the midst of the global economic-financial breakdown crisis, and the related, dangerous drive for war against Iran. Of special note was the fact that two representatives of American physical economist Lyndon LaRouche, the founder of *EIR*, were invited to address the conference, indicating the role played by LaRouche and his ideas in Malaysia under the leadership of Dr. Mahathir.

The conference was the first such gathering organized by the Institute of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's Thoughts, a new institution which had been set up at the time of the news that Mahathir would resign as Prime Minister. The institute, which is at the University Utara Malaysia, functions as a reference point for Mahathir's ideas and activities, with a particular focus on reaching the youth.

The conference theme was "Tun Dr. Mahathir: Managing Governance and Development in the 21st Century," and aimed at shedding light on the way the former Prime Minister is viewed in other countries.

In addition to the LaRouche representatives, leading Malaysian economists, political figures, and intellectuals addressed the gathering of 250 persons, as well as guests from Thailand, the Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Bangladesh.

Of Mahathir's achievements during his tenure between 1981 and 2003, those bearing the most immediate relevance to the current crisis centered on his successful fight, in 1997-98, to defend his nation's currency, economy, and people, from the savage attacks by international speculators, such as hedge fund operative George Soros. One speaker, who had been deputy finance minister during the crisis, related his experience as a participant in the National Economic Action Council, set up by Mahathir to deal with the speculative onslaught by the hedge funds. He described the meetings of the group, which made the decision in September 1998 to impose partial currency controls, ban trading of the ringgit outside the country, and fix the currency exchange rate. In response, the international financiers announced their intention to turn Malaysia into the pariah of the devel-

oping countries. Nonetheless, Malaysia succeeded with its policy, such that even the IMF later had to admit that Mahathir had been right. This speaker stressed Mahathir's emphasis on the need to "think big," and not accept any inferiority complex, as a "small" country.

Presenting LaRouche's Role

Two representatives of the LaRouche movement, this author and Jacques Cheminade, President of the Solidarité et Progrès party in France, introduced LaRouche's role as an indirect interlocutor of Mahathir over the past decade, in regard to the sovereign rights of the developing sector nations to develop, LaRouche's historic economic forecasts, and his concrete design for a new Bretton Woods system. It was recalled that, when Mahathir launched an open attack against the IMF, and the international speculators as "criminals," a hysterical *Wall Street Journal* screamed that "behind" him was the "mysterious" figure of Lyndon LaRouche. In fact, LaRouche's ideas had been circulating among Malaysian intellectual and political circles for years.

Mahathir himself addressed the conference during a round-table discussion in the evening of Aug. 1, in which he outlined his concept of governance, and expanded on the importance of infrastructure to build a modern industrial economy, focussing, especially, on the function of transportation routes as development corridors.

During the debate, this author was able to bring two critical issues to the fore: the new war plan against Iran, threatened by Vice President Dick Cheney, and denounced by LaRouche in his "Guns of August" release; and the urgent need for an international conference to hammer out a new Bretton Woods monetary system. Mahathir blasted Cheney: "You can always expect Cheney to be consistently evil. He is evil, and lies in order to justify wars. *He* represents the true 'axis of evil,' the 'evil empire.'" Mahathir added that he believed a plan existed to go to war against Syria and Iran, in the name of "democracy," as had been done with such disastrous results in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In regard to a "New Bretton Woods," Mahathir answered unequivocally, "This is long overdue. The system is not working. If Malaysia had \$1 trillion in debt, it would be declared bankrupt. Its currency would be worth less than the paper it is printed on. If the U.S. debt is \$4 trillion, however, we are told that the economy is sound, and there is growth. The United States is living on foreign debts, and on reserves kept by other countries in dollars, and by trade in dollars. We should change the system. . . . For example, the currency traders: We have to stop that. Otherwise, countries will suffer what Malaysia suffered."

Mahathir also outlined his proposal for a "gold dinar, as a currency meant *only* for trade, not for the local economy."