

Make What Is Reasonable Possible: Darién Train and Bering Straits Tunnel

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On the occasion of the 85th birthday of U.S. economist and statesman Lyndon H. LaRouche, important world figures from the various fields of statesmanship, science, and the arts, wrote messages or participated directly in an international conference held in Kiedrich, Germany on Sept. 15-16, entitled “The Eurasian Landbridge Becomes a Reality.” Dr. Héctor A. Múnera, prominent scientific researcher and former director of the Colombian Institute of Nuclear Affairs, sent a document to the event entitled “Two Great Engineering Projects for the Social and Economic Development of the Atrato Region of Colombia,” in which he advocates the completion of the Pan-American Highway, a mere 100 kilometers, across the border zone between Colombia and Panama.

Múnera presented a synopsis of various proposals for building interoceanic canals that would connect the Atlantic to the Pacific, among which the most prominent is Route 25, that is, the Atrato-Truandó Canal. Múnera recalls that in the 1980s, the Inter-Oceanic Canal Study Commission carefully considered the use of nuclear explosions for building canals between the two oceans. In a later article, Múnera detailed the potential application of peaceful nuclear energy in the developing nations.

In the context of a dialogue among friends from various cultural and ideological currents, which LaRouche is promoting on an international level, I offer the following observations:

1. Highways do not replace railroads. On the contrary, the mode of rail transport is a support to both highway and water transport. As the physicist and mathematician Bernhard Riemann demonstrated, and as has been elaborated by physical economist LaRouche, the only true source of an increase in real productivity of a process, is to regularly incorporate new universal physical principles. And the most advanced railroad mode today is the magnetic levitation, or maglev, train. Germany and Japan are in the lead in developing viable maglev designs, although China is currently the only nation that has built an operational maglev track, using German technology.

It is ironic that two Americans, James Powell and Gordon Danby, obtained the first patent in 1966 in the field of superconducting magnetic levitation. Nonetheless, the United States has still not built a maglev system. It is a shame that the U.S., which was the pioneer with Lincoln’s Transcontinental Railroad, currently has barely 10% of its train system electrified. U.S. backwardness is only comparable to that of Great

Britain, while the rest of Europe is moving toward the use of completely electric locomotives which can go from 300-350 kilometers per hour. The first-generation maglev trains can travel at 500 km/hour, although Powell and Danby, in particular, are working on a second generation, not just for passenger transport, but also for cargo containers. With magnetic levitation technology, it will be possible to put satellites in orbit or to launch space voyages at a fraction of the cost of missiles currently propelled by liquid or solid fuel. And so, in the Darién, a train should be built, preferably maglev, or perhaps a hybrid, that is, with electric tracks, but which could simultaneously operate with maglev trains. (See James Powell and Gordon Danby, “Maglev: Transport Mode for the 21st Century,” *EIR*, Sept. 21, 2007).

2. Let us make what is reasonable, possible, and not adapt to absurd fashions and ideologies, like environmentalism, which in the specific case of the Pan-American Highway, has been the argument for holding onto the so-called Darién Gap; that is, on the pretext of not disturbing the flora and fauna of the region and respecting indigenous cultures there, construction of the final 100 kilometers of the highway has been blocked, thereby preventing travel by highway from Vancouver, Canada to Patagonia, Argentina. In other words, the routes both of the Pan-American Highway and the Darién Train should be chosen in accordance with what is most appropriate for the project, and not from the standpoint of propitiating the environmentalists, who in fact want neither project carried out. Of course, feasibility studies should be carried out to adequately resolve legitimate issues of the environmental and social impact that these infrastructure projects could have, but the projects should be implemented.

As LaRouche has insisted, if the United States provides competent leadership, the rest of the world will respond favorably. And one indication of this was seen when, in 1880, the pro-Lincoln Illinois Sen. David Davis proposed the first congressional bill for the study and ultimate construction of the Intercontinental Railroad. By 1889, the Intercontinental Railroad Commission was in operation, and groups of U.S. engineers, in association with their counterparts from other nations, began the relevant field studies. However, at the Fifth Inter-American Conference in 1923, there was a dramatic setback to this perspective, and the Pan-American Railroad was abandoned; it was decided instead to promote the Pan-American Highway. In May 1971, acting under the authority of a law previously approved by the U.S. Congress, separate

agreements were struck between the governments of the United States and Panama, and the United States and Colombia, according to which the U.S. committed to financing two-thirds of the total cost of the construction of the remaining span of the Pan-American Highway, in the Darién zone. Although that U.S. law remains in effect, in October 1975, the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia prohibited allocation of funds for the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the Darién, as part of the legal case brought by the Sierra Club and other ecologist groups which questioned the environmental impact studies that had endorsed the decision to begin construction of the Darién highway.

In 1996, after international bidding, Colombia's National Institute of Roads (INVIAS) contracted new environmental studies, this time with a consortium made up of Ecology and Environment, Inc. and Hidromecánicas Ltda. And despite the fact that the National Congress of Engineering of Colombia, held Aug. 14-16, 2004, determined that this project should be given priority, to this date there has been no construction on the Darién Highway, either on the Colombian side or the Panamanian side. It must be noted that President Alvaro Uribe has insisted, to no avail, that the successive Presidents of Panama, Mireya Moscoso and more recently Martín Torrijos, promote the construction of the final span of the highway. But, on the Panamanian side, there has been no political will to carry out the project. In truth, both in Colombia and in Panama, the ministries of the environment have vetoed the highway's construction.

In sum, as LaRouche and his associates have documented, environmentalism is fascism, created by the British Crown to return humanity to the Dark Ages. And this must be stated clearly.