

Optimism Builds the Bridge to the Future

by Alberto Vizcarra Osuna

More than 600, among them farmers, workers, youth, academics, government officials, and state legislators from Sonora and Sinaloa, met Nov. 9 in one of the leading cities of the Mexican Northwest—in one of the regions with the greatest agricultural potential—Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, to participate in a forum entitled “Let Us Build the Bridge to the Future. Let’s Make the PLHINO [Water Plan of the Northwest] of the 21st Century.” The conference called by the Pro-PLHINO Committee of the 21st Century, was inspired by the idea that the state should return to a policy of vigorous public investment in basic economic infrastructure, to assure a greater availability of water, energy, and food, and to reverse the severe physical-economic damage that the country has suffered by submitting unconditionally since 1982 to the dictates of free-trade and globalization.

The PLHINO is a project first conceptualized in the mid-1960s, and drawn up as a great hydraulic work at the beginning of the 1970s. Since then, it has become the hope of a majority of inhabitants of Mexico’s Northwest, a means to consolidate cooperation among the states of Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Sonora, by building ambitious hydraulic infrastructure projects to transfer vast quantities of water from the Santiago River basin in Nayarit, to the Mayo and Yaqui River basins in Sonora.

The regulated management of voluminous amounts of water would give this region, which borders the U.S. desert state of Arizona [literally, “arid zone”] to the north, efficient sustainability. It would create tens of thousands of productive jobs; provide greater availability of water for urban and industrial use; generate electricity; develop fish-farming; expand tourism; and regularize crop and precipitation patterns, thereby improving both the ecology, and the growth of life in general. And, most importantly, it would significantly expand the agricultural frontier, allowing the production of the basic grains that the nation so urgently needs.

For 25 years, however, plans for the PLHINO has been consigned to the dustbin, as has every other major public infrastructure project in Mexico. Since the dogma of free trade seized control of Mexico after President José López Portillo left office in December 1982, the building of infrastructure, cities, and industries, and the industrialization and care of the

farm sector were abandoned, as economics was reduced to paying off the “eternal debt,” and protecting the easy-money-making rights of the foreign cartels and their local overseers.

A Marker for All Mexico

What was clear in Ciudad Obregón on Nov. 9, is the emergence of a committed leadership for the informal mass movement taking shape in the northwest of the country, under the banner of finally building the long-planned PLHINO, a movement determined to reverse free trade, and return to the General Welfare policies upon which Mexico was founded in 1810.

The leadership of the LaRouche movement in Mexico in creating that PLHINO-centered movement over decades, is well known to every Sonoran, as was acknowledged by the statewide daily, *Diario del Yaqui* in the run-up to the Ciudad Obregón forum. That daily reported on Oct. 28 that the demand to bring the PLHINO to fruition has been revived “since 2003, [when] leaders of the Permanent Forum of Rural Producers (FPPR), Adalberto Rosas López, Alberto Vizcarra Osuna, and Jaime Miranda Peláez, drawing inspiration from the economic concepts of Lyndon LaRouche, intensified their drive for the construction of the mega-project.”

The movement in Sonora and the Northwest, is a microcosm of the rebellion building up in Mexico as a whole, against the globalization and free-trade policies which have driven the Mexican economy below what can be tolerated, leaving the country without food, the most basic of human needs.

The first wave of rebellion exploded against the outcome of the July 2, 2006 Presidential elections, when millions of people camped out and marched for three months in the streets and plazas of the nation’s capital, in support of opposition candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who opposed free trade. A second wave hit, when the price of Mexico’s most common staple, tortillas, doubled in the early part of 2007.

The next wave hitting Mexico is over water itself. As people gathered in Ciudad Obregón to discuss overturning free trade’s ban on the water projects required to end years of drought in their region, the entire nation was convulsed over the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the Katrina-like flooding in the South of the country, also a consequence of free trade’s ban on water management projects.

The juxtaposition of the catastrophic floods in the South and drought in the nation’s northern grain states, at the same time that global hyperinflation threatens to make Mexico unable to afford the food imports upon which it is now dependent, has made it impossible for any sane Mexican to avoid the reality that *Mexico cannot continue to exist under globalization and free trade.*

That reality, combined with the pressure of a popular

movement kicking their backsides, has forced various levels of government institutions (city, state, federal Congress) to change their axioms, begin to fight, and turn to LaRouche and his movement to learn *how* to fight. Thus, on Nov. 14, Sonoran newspapers reported with front-page banner headlines, that the Federal Congress had finally earmarked an initial 30 million pesos (about \$2.7 million) for the feasibility study required to build the PLHINO, in the National Water Committee’s budget for 2008. A member of the Chamber of Deputies’ Water Resources Committee told the press that the decision was the result of commitments made at the Ciudad Obregón forum, which LaRouche’s associates had initiated and coordinated.

The Awakening of a Cultural Tradition

The PLHINO received on “a second wind” in 2003, the year the prolonged drought in northern Mexico reached extreme proportions. After floods devastated the southern state of Tabasco last month, some northwest farmers began referring to their 2003 as a “reverse Tabasco.” The drought hit the irrigated districts in southern Sonora and part of northern Sinaloa so severely, that more than 200,000 hectares of farmland in the Yaqui and Mayo valleys, usually devoted to corn and wheat cultivation, went unplanted. That year, the dams which supplied these irrigated zones saw their reservoir levels shrink to below 10% of capacity. It was in that same year that the leaders of the LaRouche-inspired Permanent Forum of Rural Producers published a special pamphlet on the PLHINO and the North American Water and Power Alliance (NAWAPA), that vast cross-border project to bring water from the Canadian Rocky Mountains to the Great American Desert that covers much of the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico.

The social process of discussion around that pamphlet awakened in the diverse farm, labor, and community layers the power of a deeply-rooted cultural tradition in Sonora, a state which was both carved out of the desert by intensive application of technology and infrastructure, and which has produced numerous leaders of the revolutions that have defined the sovereign personality of Mexico.

In April 2007, after the tortilla crisis had awakened official Mexico to the coming national food shortages, Sonora Sen. Alfonso Elís Serrano, with the backing of Sinaloa Sen. Mario López Valdez and Nayarit Sen. Raúl José Mejía Gonzáles, proposed and won approval in the Senate of the Republic for a resolution which identifies construction of the PLHINO as a priority, and of strategic importance to the nation’s economic development, given the nation’s urgent needs for water, energy, and food.

This commitment by the Senate gave national scope to the regional mobilization, and awakened enthusiasm in every productive sector of southern Sonora. On Aug. 15, representatives met to form the Pro-PLINHO of the 21st Century Committee, and announced themselves with an ad published in the

leading newspapers of the state of Sonora, supporting the Senate resolution.

The ad, signed by more than 30 agro-producer organizations and addressed to the President of the Republic, the governors of Sonora, Sinaloa, and Nayarit, and to the Congress, put forward the urgency of Mexico returning to a policy of food self-sufficiency, given the current international financial instability and the significant decline in the world's grain reserves. The country has entered a critical phase in its food supply, just when the United States is beginning to reduce its exports, especially of grains such as corn, of which Mexico is the world's leading importer. This is a dramatic convergence for the country, declared the ad: We face expensive and increasingly scarce food, and the threat of social instability triggered by inevitable outbreaks of hunger, if action is not taken.

Discussion in the Congress

The ad circulated widely within the Congress, where on Oct. 19, the presidents of the committees on Rural Development and Water Resources called an official meeting to receive the coordinators of the Pro-PLHINO of the 21st Century Committee. Also participating in that meeting were state senators from Sonora and Sinaloa, as well as Federal legislators from those two committees along with representatives from the National Water Commission.

The meeting centered around a presentation by engineer Manuel Frías Alcaraz, who—in the name of the Pro-PLHINO Committee—presented the technical aspects of the water project, and the comments of this author, coordinator of the committee, and widely known as an associate of Lyndon LaRouche for 30 years, who discussed the strategic importance of public investment in basic economic infrastructure.

Such programmatic discussion around the idea of the physical reconstruction of the national economy, had not been heard in the Congress since 1982. After that year, deliberations on the national budget never got beyond the unbalanced axioms of so-called budget balancing. From that point onward, public investment stopped being a catalyst for economic growth, and public expenditure was reduced to delivering handouts to Mexico's millions of victims of free-market policies.

Reality as an Ally

The Forum began with a presentation by Dennis Small, Ibero-American intelligence director for *EIR* magazine. Small's speech, entitled "The PLHINO and NAWAPA, Water Infrastructure Projects for a Model Relationship Between Mexico and the United States," laid out the global strategic reality that no project, regional or national, no matter how big, can or would be built under the current, disintegrating world financial system. Small reported that an international uproar has broken out, in which countries such as China, India, Rus-

sia, and others, are making clear that they wish to build a relationship with the United States based on cooperation, and joint efforts in the construction of great infrastructure projects.

This international impulse, Small said, represents—as Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly said—a demand that the United States return to the policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the U.S. President who put together a new economic system, known as the New Deal, to get the United States out of the Great Depression, and supported relations with other countries, guided by respect for sovereignty and looking towards agreements on development.

Building a bridge to the future will have to be founded upon the idea proposed by U.S. economist and former Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, that we create a new financial system to replace the current model, a new system based on the issuance of long-term, low-interest credit, to make world economic recovery possible, he said.

Small's detailed presentation of the idea of NAWAPA as a water project capable of transferring more than 100 cubic kilometers of water toward the Great American Desert, with a substantial portion of it, some 12 cubic kilometers, coming into the Yaqui River in Sonora, caused great excitement in the forum. The PLHINO is good, but NAWAPA, now that's *big*, many participants exclaimed.

NAWAPA, said Small, would put an end to binational conflicts based on fighting over insufficient water. This, he said, is what Roosevelt and Cárdenas would have done, and also Lincoln and Juárez, and this is what we must do now. He called on the Forum participants to turn to this historic tradition as a reference point for a model relationship between Mexico and the United States today. It is, he maintained, the tradition that LaRouche represents in the United States, but also other forces within both the Democratic and Republican parties. We have to join together, and establish ourselves as a binational force, so that these great infrastructure projects we have identified, and which are necessary, will also become practical. Small ended his presentation by saying that what today is reasonable, but apparently utopian, with our efforts will become reasonable and *possible*—an explicit reference to the famous slogan of José López Portillo, "Let us make what is reasonable, possible."

Engineer Manuel Frías Alcaraz presented what is now viewed as the first physical outline of an updated, PLHINO of the 21st Century. Premised on elementary physical principles, Frías's proposal contemplates the transfer of 7 billion cubic meters of water, taking advantage of the overflow of the rivers of northern Nayarit and southern Sinaloa, to irrigate an additional surface of 800,000 hectares in the states of Sinaloa and Sonora. Frías's presentation, supported by maps to scale, which defined the location of the new storage sites that need to be built, documented the necessary construction of tunnels to assure that water transfer is done pri-

marily by gravity, and avoiding pumping to the extent possible, so as to reduce the fixed operating costs of the project.

Alberto Vizcarra emphasized in his presentation that the crisis of world financial disintegration is putting Mexico at a crossroads of adverse factors, that are shaping up as “a perfect storm.” And he detailed them: increasing international prices for food products, worsening dependency on food imports, mass deportation of undocumented Mexican immigrants from the United States, a decline in remittances being sent into Mexico from workers abroad, imported inflation and growing nationwide unemployment. Given all this, he said, Mexico has to define policies of economic protection which strengthen its productive potential, primarily in those regions where there exist the possibilities of increasing basic grain production that can address the tremendous vulnerability Mexico faces on this front.

The country’s Northwest, said Vizcarra, is a region which has a great national responsibility, in the midst of this international financial crisis. It is an affair of state, and a national security matter, that projects like the PLHINO be completed.

The historic nature of this movement and of this Forum, Vizcarra emphasized, is that we are meeting in the name of the future. And our experience throughout this whole organizing process is that when two or more people meet in the name of posterity, they gain an extraordinary power. With that power, he continued, we will make sure that this great moment does not find a morally small people. We are taking up what our forefathers had intended be done. Let us realize their intentions, so that they can rest in peace, and so that we can give a promising future to present and future generations.

In his speech which followed, Sen. Alfonso Elías Serrano led the participants to reflect upon the change in thinking required for Mexico to secure the future, asking: At what moment did we stop thinking about the future and forget about great projects? In the 1980s, we stopped being “normal” people, he noted, and by the 1990s, when we signed the Free Trade Agreement, we even adopted the mistaken idea that it would be cheaper to import our food, than to produce it at home (see speech, below).

After the forum adopted a final resolution, the “Agreement of the Northwest” (see text, below), Sonora Gov. Eduardo Bours Caste gave the closing speech. He began by referencing Sen. Elías Serrano’s point, that to be “normal” means to think big. The country, he said, has no shortage of resources, only a shortage of infrastructure to adequately develop those resources. He criticized those who question the idea of great projects, because they lack vision. Therefore, we must change the way people think, and teach them to think big. Projects like the PLHINO, he concluded, are not short-term endeavors, but for the coming generations. And it is the responsibility of our generation to complete them.