

LaRouche: Build Up the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

by Marcia Merry Baker

American Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, in a recent conversation with a commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said that among the first actions LaRouche would take as President, would be to build up the Corps, as part of the re-institution of national military service, to carry out the founding mission of the Corps for infrastructure construction. LaRouche cited the way the Corps functioned during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Presidency. The Army Corps headed up the Civilian Conservation Corps, which built public works and fought the Depression, employing millions—especially youth, who were in dire need of both skills and hope.

This viewpoint was conveyed to Congress in testimony from *EIR* (below), for the record, to the House Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment, which held an oversight hearing on the Army Corps of Engineers on June 24.

The urgency of this viewpoint is shown today by two developments: the breakdown in the inland navigation system of the nation—one of the chief responsibilities of the Army Corps, which has been severely underfunded and undermanned; and by the particular opportunity to reverse this process, provided by the Corps' new proposal before Congress, for authorization to refurbish the 37 locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois Waterway system. This proposal—released as a 500-page report in May—should be approved as a matter of urgent national interest. Likewise, the general funding of the Corps should be upped to the level needed for all its ongoing responsibilities—12,000 miles of waterways, 240 commercially active locks and dams, coastal maintenance etc.—plus funding for the backlog of \$35 billion of already authorized, but never funded, Corps projects.

In the Summer of 2002, LaRouche made the U.S. transportation-system crisis the leading edge of a policy intervention, in which he called on President Bush to save Amtrak and the commercial airlines, and to act on all the infrastructure

needs of the nation. Since that time, the transportation situation has worsened: Today's United Airlines crisis reflects the general state of commercial aviation; Amtrak has been held together, month by month, only by its staff and Amtrak president David Gunn's ingenuity. Now the inland waterway system is disintegrating.

The result of 20 years of underfunding of the Army Corps has reached the stage where structures are worn out, and de-staffing means shutdown. Of the United States' 240 active inland waterway lock chambers, 113—or 47%—are 50 years old or more, which is past their engineering lifespan. Some are 70 years old or more. The operating hours have been cut back on the locks of the Ohio and Mississippi systems—the central part of the nation's inland navigation. Aged lock-chambers are unstable at many sites, and congestion from breakdowns and repairs is inevitable. For want of money, whole sets of locks and dams are threatened with shutdown altogether. Of the 37 locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi and Illinois waterway systems, very few of the 600 foot locks have been converted to the modern 1,200 foot length, so tows must be broken apart. The Army Corps' "Preferred Integrated Plan" calls for beginning with replacing seven of the old locks, and a decades-long timetable for the rest. In June, the Corps held eight public hearings on its plans, in five Midwest states and Washington, D.C.; an *EIR* interview with a Corps engineer appears below.

What is urgently required is for Congress not only to approve the Corps' plan, but to mandate a more rapid and sweeping overhaul. The bipartisan potentiality is shown by a June 23 approval vote of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, for a provision sponsored by Sen. Kit Bond (R-Mo.), a \$3 billion proposal which would authorize \$1.46 billion to go forward on designs for seven new lock replacements on the Upper Mississippi. Bond noted that this could create 48 million man-hours of construction work.