

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT

Bering Strait Tunnel Back on World Agenda!

by Rachel Douglas

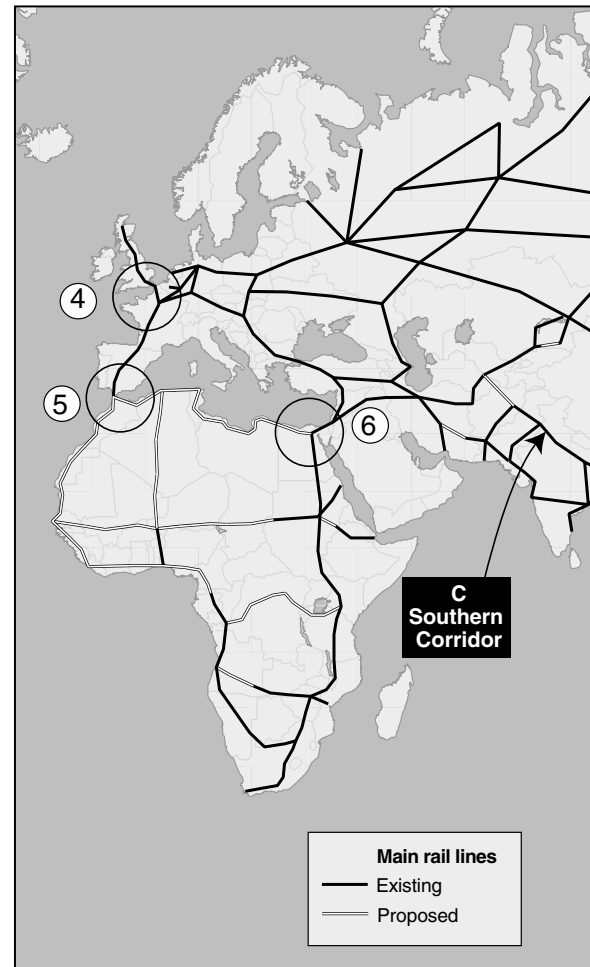
Introduction

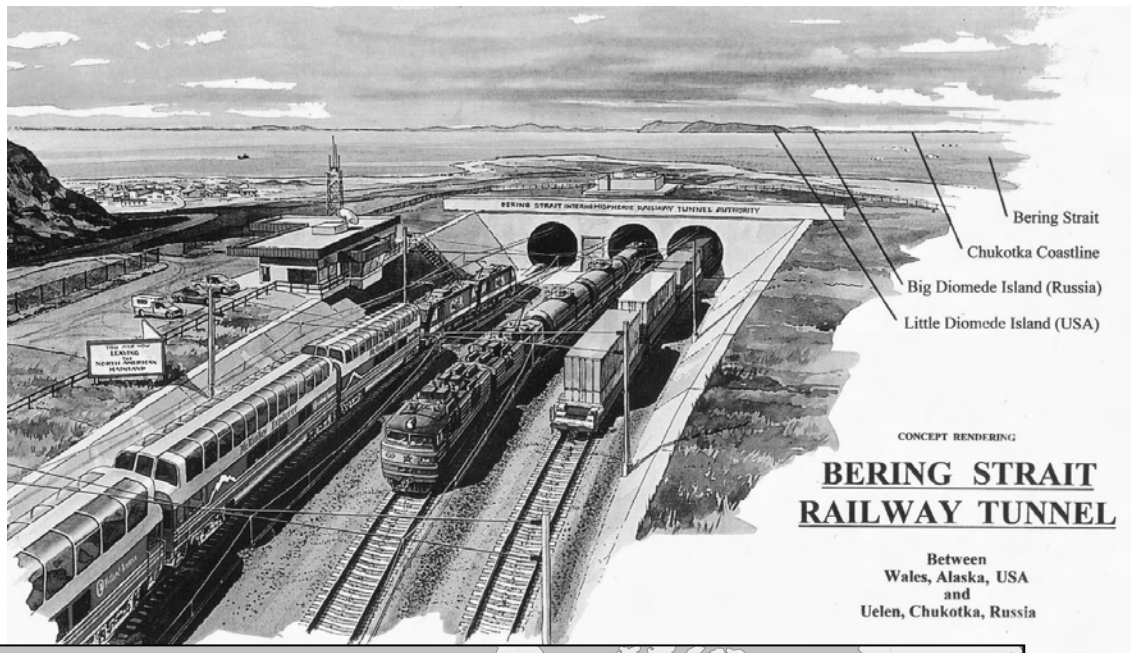
Several hundred people gathered in Moscow on April 24 at a conference called “Megaprojects of Russia’s East: A Transcontinental Eurasia-America Transport Link via the Bering Strait.” News of their discussions touched off a wave of optimistic thinking in many countries, that the time has arrived for one of the greatest of great infrastructure projects: a tunnel beneath the Bering Strait between the U.S. state of Alaska and Russia’s Chukotka Region.

The participants issued an appeal to governments of the Group of Eight member countries, to place the Bering Strait megaproject on the agenda of the G-8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, in June (see p. 43). Russia’s Ambassador to Canada Georgi Mamedov told the *Toronto Globe and Mail* that he is now optimistic that the tunnel will be built. Mamedov expects President Vladimir Putin to discuss the Bering Strait project with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, when they meet in Heiligendamm. “We need Canada aboard,” he said.

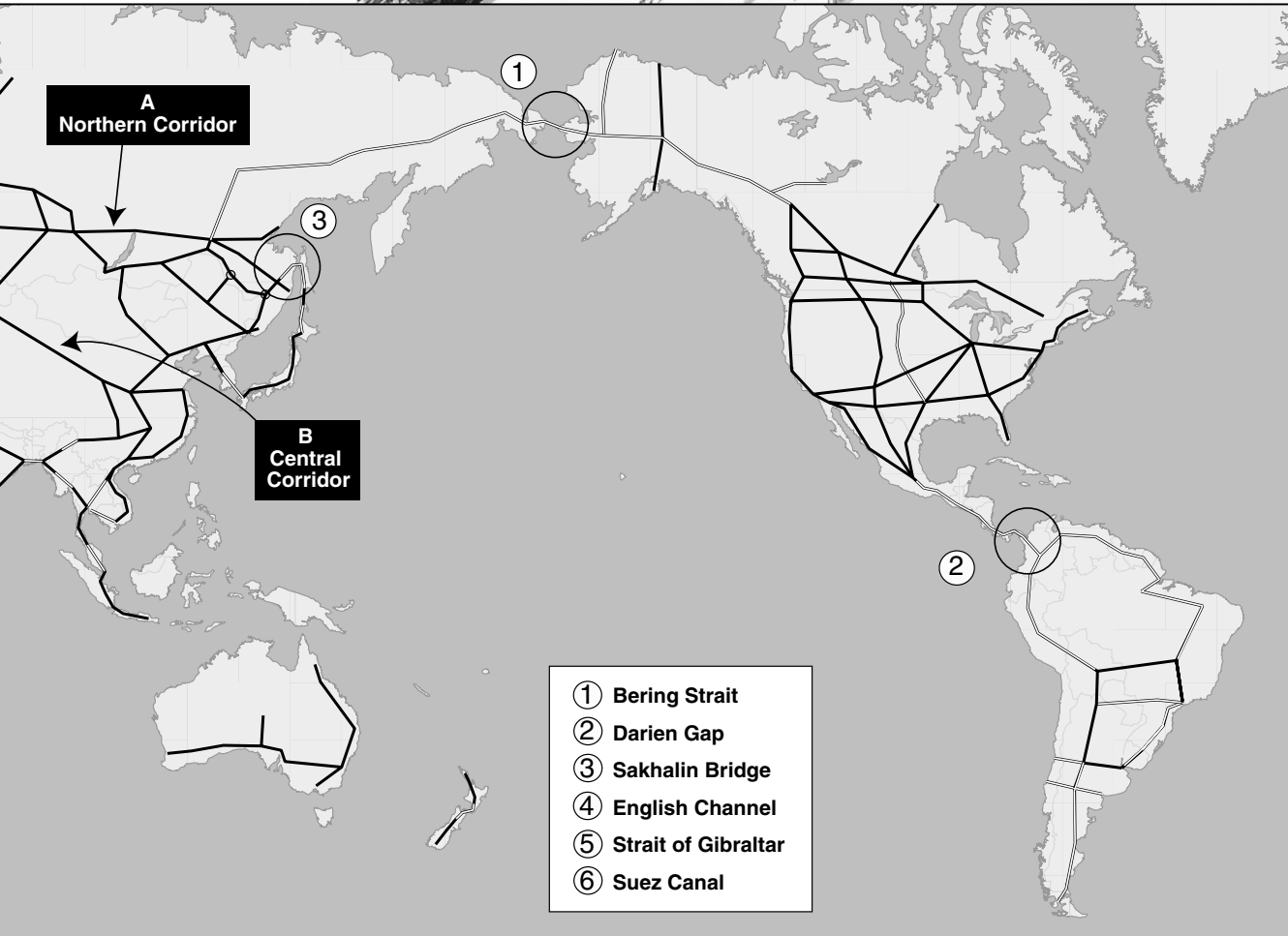
It is fitting that two American participants from the World War II generation put forward the idea that such great development projects are the path leading away from war. They were former U.S. Secretary of the Interior and Governor of Alaska, Walter Hickel, a strong backer of the Bering Strait tunnel project for many years, and economist and *EIR* founder, Lyndon LaRouche.¹ LaRouche, who as early as 1978 called for a Bering Strait bridge-tunnel crossing, wrote a conference presentation, “The World’s Political Map Changes: Mendeleev Would Have Agreed,” in response to a request from conference organizers. His contribution was

The megaproject to link Eurasia and America, as part of the World Land-Bridge, was propelled to center stage by an international conference in Moscow.





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THE PROPOSED WORLD LAND BRIDGE

The proposed Bering Strait connection between Russia's Chukotka Region and Alaska is shown at (1).

Source: EIR



FORUM International

Maxim Bystrov, deputy head of Russia's Federal Agency for the Management of Special Economic Zones, addresses the Moscow conference. The Russian government is giving enthusiastic support to the Bering Strait project.

read to the gathering and will appear in a publication in connection with the event.

The Americans radiated confidence that the Bering Strait project can be done, bringing North America into the Eurasian development perspective that is otherwise being promoted through such agencies as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It would be, as LaRouche said in Moscow in 2001, part of "the greatest transformation of the biosphere in history."

High-level Russian specialists from Federal agencies, regional governments, and the Russian Academy of Sciences took part in the Bering Strait meeting, along with specialists from Japan and Korea. It was the first of a "Megaprojects of Russia's East" conference series, organized by the Russian Academy of Sciences Council for the Study of Productive Forces (SOPS), in conjunction with the Russian Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MERT), the Russian Ministry of Transport, the state-owned company Russian Railroads, and several regional governments in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

Victor Razbegin, who works in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade's Industrial Research department, gave a press conference on April 18 with other members of the Bering Strait project group, to publicize the forthcoming conference. Their huge map of the Arctic connection, and their enthusiasm for the \$65 billion multi-modal project, with its associated long-distance rail and power lines, grabbed headlines in Russia. More than 60 stories about it appeared in press, web, and other electronic media, including a report on

NTV, Russian national television Channel 2. NTV showed a dynamic map of the projected rail line from Yakutsk in East Siberia, through Nome and Fairbanks, to Fort Nelson in Canada.

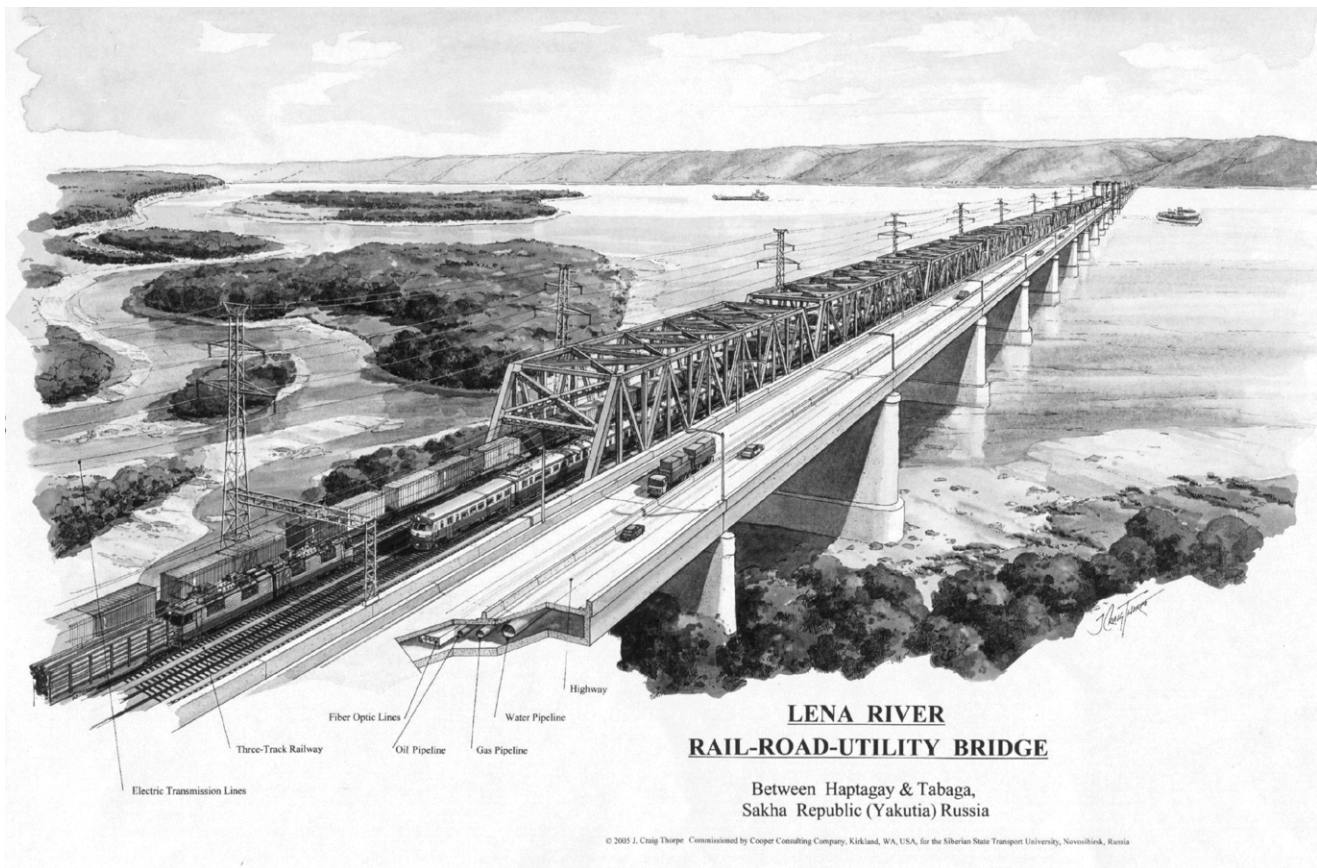
Academician Alexander Granberg, head of the Council for the Study of Productive Forces, described the project's advantages, in an April 16 interview for the economics website OPEC.ru. He said the road, rail, and pipeline connection would handle 3 percent of total world trade in physical goods. It will make it possible to harness more of eastern Russia's hydroelectric potential. It will allow development of previously inaccessible mineral resource deposits. And, said Granberg, the connection of the power systems of Siberia, the Russian Far East, and North America will create economies in electricity supply, worth \$20 billion annually.

Russia's leadership, according to Granberg, now sees the development of transportation infrastructure as essential for uplifting Russia's vast outlying regions. Demonstration of this, he said, was an April 10 presentation by Vladimir Yakunin, head of the state-owned company Russian Railways, at a meeting on rail transport, chaired by Putin. There, Yakunin laid out the construction of a 3,500-km rail line from the Lena River to the Bering Strait, as a high-priority task. The Lena is the easternmost of Siberia's three great river systems, and is the tenth longest river in the world.

Feasibility and Financing

Victor Razbegin, who works in the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade's Industrial Research Department, like Governor Hickel, has been closely involved in efforts to secure action on the Bering Strait project, for more than a decade, as our review of its history shows (see below). Another longtime Bering Strait tunnel enthusiast is the American engineer Hal Cooper, whose overview of the scheme *EIR* published in 1994, and whose detailed work-up of its parameters has recently drawn renewed attention from Russian, as well as American promoters of a Bering Strait crossing. Cooper told *EIR* the week of the Moscow conference, that the push for the project may have reached "a real phase shift" now.

Speaking at the April 24 event, under big banners with maps of the intercontinental project, Academician Granberg said that the next step should be design and feasibility studies for the 6,000-km rail-road-pipeline-power



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This proposed bridge would cross the Lena River near the city of Yakutsk, in Russia's Sakha Republic, creating a rail link that would sweep east to Alaska and south to China.

corridor from Yakutsk to Fort Nelson, including 85-100 km of tunnel under the Bering Strait. There will really be two tunnels, Granberg pointed out, because Big Diomed Island (Russia) and Little Diomed Island (U.S.A.) lie close together in the middle of the strait. Since Japan already has built 50-km underwater tunnels between its islands, Granberg remarked, the technologies involved are proven ones.

Conference participant Louis Cerny of the American Railroad Association also presented the technical feasibility of the Bering Strait crossing, noting that the schedule for the project as a whole could be sped up by simultaneous construction of its different parts.

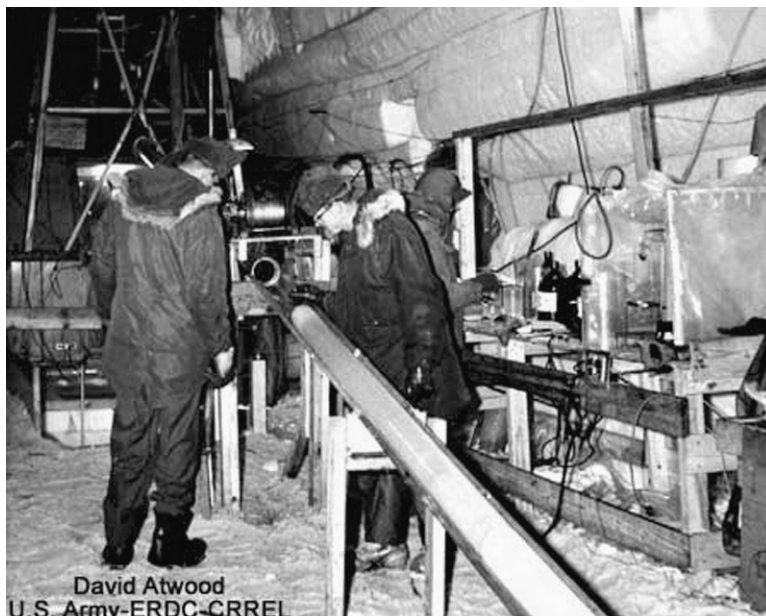
Many of the Russian speakers referred to recent government decisions, which make the Bering Strait project a live option. One of these is the Federal Target Program called "Development of the Far East and Transbaikalian Region" to 2013. Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov has been active in launching an array of measures to address the underdevelopment and depopulation of these regions.

Dr. Jonathan Tennenbaum, a collaborator of LaRouche for many years, and a member of the *21st Century Scientific Advisory Board*, introduced LaRouche's paper to the conference as the work of the American economist, best known in Russia for his science of physical economy and his advoca-

cy of basic infrastructure projects. LaRouche's discussion of the legacy of chemist and national economist Dmitri Mendeleev, as well as his relating the cooperation of great nations on the Bering Strait project to the tasks of war-avoidance, were received with interest by the Russian participants.

Tennenbaum, who is known in Russia especially as a co-author of *EIR's* 1997 Special Report *The Eurasian Land-Bridge: The 'New Silk Road'—Locomotive for Worldwide Economic Development*, then elaborated the concept of infrastructure corridors, and networks of intersecting such corridors. Building them in the far north is a challenge for the 21st Century, he said, which can be met by building chains of nuclear-powered cities. U.S. work on building the nuclear-powered research town, Camp Century, under the ice in northern Greenland in the 1960s, together with Russia's city-building experience in Siberia, makes this a tailor-made area for U.S.-Russian cooperation, Tennenbaum said.

Maxim Bystrov, deputy head of Russia's Federal Agency for Special Economic Zones, picked up on LaRouche's and Tennenbaum's remarks about the enormous financial bubble that exists today, as against the potential for directing funds into productive investment like these infrastructure projects. Liquidity won't flow into long-term projects on its



David Atwood
U.S. Army-ERDC-CRREL

David Atwood/U.S. Army-ERDC-Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory

The United States has experience working and building in the Arctic temperatures. This photo was taken in 1964 at the nuclear-powered Camp Century, Greenland, which operated for five years. Here, work underground with Arctic ice cores.

own, Bystrov stressed. He said that the Russian government would advocate attracting private concessionaires for the project, rather than rely solely on state funding from the countries involved. At the same time, Bystrov said that his agency was prepared to put up \$120 million for the feasibility studies.

Governor of Yakutia (in the Sakha Republic) Vyacheslav Shtyrov, whose paper was read to the meeting by the region's representative in Moscow, discussed the enormous development potential of that East Siberian region. With a land area equal to half the size of the lower 48 U.S. states, covering three time zones and extending to the Arctic Coast, Yakutia's population is less than that of Rhode Island. Shtyrov noted that "we have all of the elements of Mendeleev's periodic table" in Yakutia, as well as enthusiasm for Mendeleev's ideas about development.

Contagious Optimism

News of the high-level Russian backing for the Bering Strait tunnel project was welcomed across Eurasia, from Sweden to Japan. *Dagens Industrie*, a Swedish business newspaper, reported favorably on it in the April 25 issue. German press coverage cited enthusiastic responses from China, Korea, and Japan, including the view of some Japanese business circles that the tunnel could be built for \$60 million per kilometer, half the price that that was cited in Moscow. Germany's *Spiegel Online* in its coverage added mention of an article on the project, penned by Vladimir Brezhnev, CEO of the Russian construction firm *Transstroi*, in 2005 in the magazine *Tunneling and Underground Space Technology*. In that article, Brezhnev and co-authors wrote: "Among tunnel experts, there is no doubt that the imple-

mentation of the described tunnels is technically feasible."

In Denmark, where national attention has been focussed on the Schiller Institute's program for magnetic levitation rail infrastructure, Schiller Institute leader Tom Gillesberg pointed out that Vitus Bering, for whom the strait is named, was a Dane in the service of the Russian Navy, during the time of Peter the Great in the early 18th Century.

Publication of a story about the Bering Strait project on the Saudi Arabian news website *Elaph.com* brought forth contagious optimism. The report said, "The cost of this gigantic transport project, \$65 billion, will be quickly paid back through the revenue, created by the transit of goods between the countries in the region." Comments on the site, from readers in Arab countries, as well as Arab-Americans and Arab-Canadians, urged the Arab states to learn from Russia, Canada, the U.S.A., and Asia, and launch construction of a network of railroads and bridges throughout the Arab world, from the Persian Gulf to North Africa.

In Russia itself, many identify the Bering Strait project with LaRouche. The Bering Strait rail line was shown on maps in *EIR's* 1997 Special Report on the

Eurasian Land-Bridge (see map pp. 38-39). Academician Sergei Rogov of the Institute of the U.S.A. and Canada, and Academician Vladimir Myasnikov, then of the Far East Institute, used reproductions of *EIR's* map, to illustrate their articles on Eurasia's development potential, appearing in major Russian publications in the late 1990s.

On his return from Moscow, Jonathan Tennenbaum reported that the conference was a central event in a very broad-ranging debate in Russia, around the absolute need for great projects. There was extensive debate and discussion at the Moscow event on the problem of financing the Bering Strait tunnel and development corridor. The deputy chairman of Russia's Federal Agency for Special Economic Zones, during his presentation, concurred with Tennenbaum's remarks regarding the need to immediately invest existing liquidity, such as the Russian government's stabilization fund derived from oil and gas revenues, into such big high-technology projects of new infrastructure.

Typical of the Bering Strait project's reputation as LaRouche's idea, and of the growing sense of such ideas' potential to change even the most rigid institutional attitudes, is a Russian blogger's comment, posted April 23. With reference to a recent U.S. State Department report, which pledged support for regime-change in the former Soviet region under the banner of "pro-democracy" movements, the writer commented: "This I must mentally applaud: answering the State Department's latest attack, by proposing a gigantic, joint investment project—the dream of Lyndon LaRouche, who advised the Democrats during the most recent Congressional elections; and this from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, no less, though it's headed by one of our dyed-in-the-wool liberals!"