
Resource Strategy

Water for growth in California

by Sylvia Barkley

As stated by *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche in his National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC) policy paper on water development for the United States, published in part in this journal Jan. 19, "Next to a general thermonuclear war, the greatest single environmental danger to the American people over the coming two decades is that whole regions of our nation will simply run out of usable fresh water supplies."

This danger is particularly acute in California. The critical importance of water development in California is that not only does the state currently support 10 percent of the population of the United States, it supplies 10 percent (by value) of the national food supply, which is equivalent to 40 percent of total U.S. exports. All agriculture in the state depends on irrigation.

There is no doubt of the immediate need for the increased transfer of water to Southern California. At present, the southern San Joaquin valley is experiencing a massive overdraft of ground-water supplies (extraction of more water than is naturally replaced). The Metropolitan Water District, which supplies Los Angeles, is facing the loss of half of the Colorado River water which it currently uses, or two-thirds of its total allocation from the river to Arizona under the terms of the Central Arizona Water Project agreement.

On Jan. 13, NDPC-supported candidate for Democratic nomination for the Senate in California William Wertz presented a White Paper for water development in the state, focusing on the Peripheral Canal project now being debated in the state legislature to meet immediate need in the San Joaquin valley.

The Peripheral Canal will connect the Sacramento River, through which most of the water flows from the high-rainfall northern section of the state, to the canal system which serves the drier southern section. At present, this connection is made by pouring the fresh water from Northern California into the marshy channels of the Sacramento River Delta, on its northern edge, and pumping water out at the southern end. However, approximately 80 percent of the inflow is wasted, since the pumping rate out of the Delta is limited by the intrusion of brackish water from San

Francisco Bay.

The Peripheral Canal, Wertz proposes, will become a vital link in the continent-scale NAWAPA project. NAWAPA (North American Water and Power Alliance), developed in 1964 by the Ralph M. Parsons Company of Pasadena, California, would use a 500-mile long valley in the Canadian Rockies as a natural reservoir to catch and store part of the enormous volumes of water now being lost as runoff in Alaska and Northwest Canada. By constructing major networks of irrigation canals, and connection into the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River, NAWAPA would move 130 million acre-feet of water per year (MAFY) for irrigation in the United States, and 100 MAFY for Canada and Mexico. The project would supply over 50,000 megawatts electric (MWE) in hydroelectric capacity *above* the amount of power used to move the water.

This water would enter California in two ways. One is via a major reservoir in the Panamint Valley, which would be easily connected the existing Owens Valley water supply for Los Angeles. The second route would be along the path of the Colorado River, where the water could be used for the further development of the blooming deserts of the Imperial and Coachella Valleys, and create immense possibilities for developing the Mohave Desert as well.

Before the intervention of Will Wertz, the debate over the Peripheral Canal had been defined, both "pro" and "con," along essentially environmentalist, no-growth lines. The project is opposed by Tom Hayden and his Campaign for Economic Democracy. Hayden's actual ally, Governor Jerry Brown, whom Wertz is challenging for the Senate nomination, is the leader of group who officially support the Canal, but are making every effort to insure that its construction is expensive, ineffective, and therefore will be the end of water development in the state. Brown's faction is explicitly requiring that very strict provisions against future water development are a condition for passage of the Peripheral Canal funding bill. Brown and his Resource Secretary Huey Johnson have published an official state document, *Investing for Prosperity*, based on "the guiding principle . . . that biological, water, and Earth resources are the real wealth of our State." This is the basis of the report's commitment to "vigorously implement the existing constitutional prohibitions against waste and unreasonable use of water. . . . California's water resources are limited and our economic ability to develop them is limited." The conservation goal is to "save" 2.5 MAFY each year.

The actual needs and resources of California are the polar opposite. These are based on rates of growth projected from a decade when economic and population growth were still real. During the period 1950 to 1960,

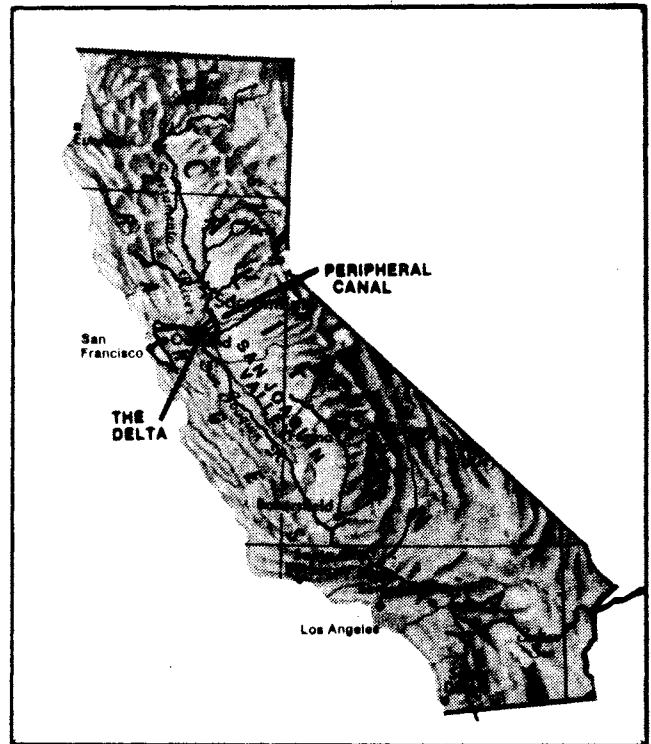
the state population grew at an overall rate of 24 percent. Applied to the current state population of 23.7 million, this will add 5.7 million people by 1991, and at that time, if the rate decreases to a still healthy 17 percent projected under Reagan's governorship, by 2010 the population would reach 40 million.

The water required to sustain the necessary growth can be computed from existing information. In 1972, the total domestic and industrial water use per capita was 0.25 acre-feet per year (AFY). The additional water needed to sustain growth to the year 1991 will be 1.4 MAFY. To this should be added at least 0.4 MAFY to replace the water now scheduled to be diverted from California's allocation of Colorado River water. In computing the water needs for 2010, however, some increase in average water use should be included to allow for increased industrial development. If the conservative figure of 0.3 AFY is used, the increase of water needed for domestic and industrial use would be 6.2 MAFY.

To meet today's demands, again we must look at a past period of growth. During the 1950 to 1960 period, one million acres of land were added to irrigated productive farmland. To add a comparable area in the coming decade, 3.6 MAFY are needed. At the same time this expansion occurs, to reduce the current overdraft by at least 50 percent by 1991, the agricultural requirements will be to 4.3 MAFY. By 2010, the same growth will mean 3 million irrigated acres have been added. However, the average rate of water application should be increased to avoid the build up of salts in the soil, which can only be done by flushing the soil, increasing water use by at least 25 percent to a level of 4.5 acre feet per acre year from the current 3.6 acre feet. This will bring agricultural requirements to 21 MAFY. To eliminate the overdraft of groundwater in the state will add 2.2 MAFY to agricultural needs.

In total then, California will need 6 MAFY by 1991, and 30 MAFY by 2010. This is a monumental task, but California does not lack the capability to do it, nor should the state perform it alone. The history of California's development is in large part the history of water projects, most of them beyond the scope considered "practical" at the time. Both Los Angeles and San Francisco import their water, the former over almost 250 miles of desert. Agriculture has been dependent on irrigation as well, first on groundwater alone, then on the massive public works of the 1930s such as the Central Valley project. By the 1960s, however the commitment to progress was already being undermined by the forces which were grooming Tom Hayden. At that time, an integrated plan for the statewide development of irrigation and transportation, the Weber Plan, was rejected by the state legislature.

Charles Weber III, the author of the plan, a civil



engineer and member of the California legislature, based his proposals explicitly on "criteria which we have set up as being in accord with natural law." His plan included a barge canal from north of Redding to Bakersfield for transport of agricultural produce in particular, and making the San Francisco Bay, now salt, a "fresh-water bank" for the rest of the state.

The Weber Plan has been superseded by some of the specifics of the state water plan, and each of these has added to the overall health of the state, but together they do not represent the level of nation-building which the Weber Plan embodied. California must not make another such mistake.

The Peripheral Canal is a crucial link in the development of California's water resources; however, it can in no way be considered the end-point of that process. The Peripheral Canal is vital both immediately, to allow continuation of that expansion, and over the longer term, to provide an efficient source of water for the southern San Joaquin Valley. Most important, it represents a mechanism by which the citizens of California can demonstrate that they have finally dealt with the green fascist mentality of Brown and Hayden, and are once again committed to the development of the state.

A lengthier treatment of this material appears in a White Paper issued by William Wertz of the National Democratic Policy Committee, entitled "Solving California's Water Needs with Water from Alaska." Mr. Wertz is a candidate for the Democratic senatorial nomination in California.