
Conference Report

Diplomats see chance for Thais' Kra Canal

by Stephanie Pauls

The first in a series of *Executive Intelligence Review* seminars on "The Kra Canal and the future of the Pacific Basin Economies," held in New York City on Jan. 16, drew the attention of diplomatic representatives of the ASEAN states and representatives of Korean and Japanese industry and banking.

Featured participants at the seminars were Pakdee and Sophie Tanapura, *EIR* representatives in Bangkok, who are presently touring the United States to test out support for this massive project, in which a canal would be cut across Thailand at the Isthmus of Kra, permitting expanded world shipping traffic and avoiding a potential 21st-century bottleneck at the Strait of Malacca. New opportunities to launch the Kra Canal project were opened up after the conference the Tanapuras organized with the Ministry of Communications in Thailand on Oct. 27, 1983, featuring *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche. That conference put the Kra Canal at the forefront of thinking among Thai military, business, and government circles. In the United States, the Tanapuras have held discussions with Washington officials and port and shipping representatives, meeting an enthusiastic response. Now that enthusiasm needs to be translated into action.

As *EIR* Asia editor Linda de Hoyos pointed out to the audience at the New York seminar, *EIR*'s promotion of the Kra Canal is one part of a package of great infrastructural projects put forward by LaRouche upon his return from Japan and India last summer. LaRouche issued a report on five development prospects for the region, as a motor for Pacific-Indian Ocean industrialization: 1) building a canal through the Kra Isthmus; 2) digging a second Panama canal; 3) building a North-South Canal in China; 4) development of the Mekong Delta in Vietnam; 5) development of the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta in India.

The seminar in New York City also featured *EIR* Contributing Editor Uwe Parpart-Henke, who has been involved in discussions on the Kra Canal Project for more than a year.

Parpart-Henke conveyed to the audience a detailed picture of prospects for Pacific Basin development in the decades ahead, demonstrating why this necessitates building the Kra Canal and digging a second Panama Canal. He presented *EIR* case studies which showed that even on the conservative

assumption of an annual rate of growth of trade of 5 percent over the coming 20 years—as compared to the actual annual growth rate of 10.6 percent in 1960-80—the Panama Canal and the Malacca Strait would turn out to have serious bottlenecks.

Parpart-Henke went on to outline the history of the Kra Canal proposal from King Ramses IV of Siam in the 19th century to the feasibility studies of the early 1970s conducted jointly by Japanese and American firms. He provided detailed arguments favoring a route south of the isthmus. If started now, he said, the canal could be ready around the year 2000.

Parpart-Henke made it clear that he was well aware of the political and strategic considerations that concern Thai leaders and neighboring countries. He stressed that with an influx of capital and technology, the industrialization of the area would help to unify Thailand, and assimilate the Muslim minority in its southern part, rather than divide the nation as some fear.

Worries about U.S. policy

Pakdee Tanapura pointed to the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Thai-American relations as the opportunity to re-evaluate American policy. Under the influence of Henry Kissinger and the Eastern Establishment, U.S. policy has helped to create inroads for the Soviets, who are now embarked on a course of "empire-building."

This is contrary to the tradition of Thai-American relations, which have been based historically on the principle of defending Thailand from takeover by colonialist looters. Mr. Tanapura cited the example of U.S. input of technology into Siam in the 1850s and the U.S. contributions to the Siam education system, as well as U.S. influence on the Meiji Restoration in Japan as a model for relationships between countries based on the principle of an "entente of sovereign republics."

A Thai representative stressed that despite the fact that the Kra Canal was a matter of sovereign Thai decision, Thailand would first have to consult with neighboring countries. Some concern with respect to the use of peaceful nuclear explosions to build the canal was raised because of the proximity of the project to international waters. Much of the discussion was focused on the issue of U.S. foreign policy; members of the audience asked whether protectionism would undermine any well-conceived project.

Parpart-Henke noted that U.S. policy is intermingled with the International Monetary Fund's conditionalities policy, which has already ruined Ibero-American countries and is undermining the Philippines and Indonesia right now. The problem to be solved in the United States is to reorient U.S. policy to support the kind of great projects *EIR* is proposing, he said.

Upcoming *EIR* seminars on the Kra Canal project will be held Jan. 25 in Chicago, Jan. 27 in Los Angeles, Jan. 30 in San Francisco, and Feb. 1 in Seattle.