
Interview: Pongpol Adireksarn

A Thai deputy is campaigning for the Kra Canal

A proposal for constructing a canal across the Isthmus of Kra in Thailand has been the subject of intense public and private discussion in Thailand since an October 1983 conference in Bangkok organized by EIR and the Fusion Energy Foundation, in collaboration with the Thai Ministry of Communications. At that time, Lyndon H. LaRouche presented the canal proposal as part of a five-part plan for development of the Indian and Pacific oceans' basin. The development projects were designed as a crucial intervention into the strategic-political situation in the entire region.

One supporter of the Kra Canal project is a parliamentarian from Sanaburi, Pongpol Adireksarn, a member of the opposition Chat Thai party, the largest political party in Thailand, and the one broadly recognized as the "businessmen's party." Mr. Adireksarn is now touring the United States at the invitation of the Institute of International Education, and has asked to be shown U.S. inland water management projects during his stay.

One of the more outspoken members of the Chat Thai party, Pongpol Adireksarn told EIR that he feels that he has time on his side. He, unlike some of his fellow party members, is in no hurry to join the governmental coalition. "You are in the same government in order to carry out some joint tasks such as key development projects like the Kra Canal. Will Prime Minister Prem support the Kra Canal project?" he asks.

In December 1983, Mr. Adireksarn was interviewed in two Thai newspapers, where he expressed his own views on the national and regional importance of moving the Kra Canal project ahead. Much of the statistical material he reviewed was taken from the project proposal prepared by EIR and the Fusion Energy Foundation and released under the title "A Fifty-Year Development Policy for the Indian-Pacific Oceans Basin."

We publish here excerpts from Mr. Adireksarn's interview with the Bangkok weekly Wongchorn, in its Dec. 19-25, 1983 issue.

People of my age belong to a new generation that should have something new to propose for the future, for the ten to twenty years ahead. Thailand should have some kind of development program on an international scale. . . . I am very interested in developing the southern coast, the passage route for maritime traffic from Europe, through the Suez Canal, across the Indian Ocean and through the southern part of Thailand, out into the China Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

It is estimated today that about 40,000 ships go through the Strait of Malacca. In ten years, there will be around 100,000 ships per year. This could create some safety problems as well as inconveniences.

It is amazing that foreign countries are more interested in digging the Kra Canal than the Thais themselves. They look at the project from the standpoint of what is strategic and what is in the interests of the whole world. . . .

The canal, unlike the Panama Canal, is going to be a sea-level one, which would allow ships of 500,000 tons to pass through. . . . It will become a meeting point for transshipment between Asia and Europe. . . . Intense industrial activity will result, including the shipbuilding, ship repairing and even steel industries, . . . oil refineries and petrochemical industries. Instead of exporting raw materials such as rubber and tin, we can instead export manufactured goods. In addition, there will be a higher urban concentration of people . . . with around 200,000 inhabitants [in the Canal area], international trade will be stimulated and Thai citizens will not need to go to the Middle East to work. They will be able to find jobs domestically. . . .

I would like to call this project the Surasri Canal, after His Royal Highness Surasrihanat, the younger brother of King Rama I, who 190 years ago was the first to have the idea of digging a Kra Canal.

The government must decide . . . by simply giving the green light. A company could be formed in which the Thai government and other interested governments would be shareholders. The Thais could hold 51% of the equity and the foreigners 49%. Of the 51%, 20-30% of that could be held by the government, and the remainder by Thai private interests. As for the 49% to be held by foreigners, there are many, many countries that are highly interested in the project, such as the United States, Japan, or Middle Eastern nations. We also have the OECD countries as a whole that are undergoing an economic crisis, a crisis which can be solved by investing in new projects.

The government should then give industrial zone concessions . . . how long? Perhaps 50 years. We must also allot the development tasks to different countries according to their special skills. . . .

I think that if Singapore is intelligent it would ask to participate in the program. . . . Were we to accomplish this project, Malaysia just might support it. Ships can still go through the Strait of Malacca, which means that we will in effect have two channels.