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## Interview: Julius Binder

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# Big Gabcikovo canal outlasts WWF assault

Gabcikovo, Slovakia is the site of one of the biggest water projects ever built in Central Europe. In the 1970s, Hungary and Czechoslovakia agreed to build a navigable canal of 40 kilometers in length, in order to bypass the area called the "interior delta" of the Danube River, which has, since 1922, delineated the border between the two countries. A power plant was constructed at Gabcikovo to use the power of the Danube. Another power plant was to be built at Nagymaros, Hungary.

In 1989, Hungary's parliament decided to abrogate the agreement and to abandon the project, which was nearly completed, as far as the constructions on Slovakian territory were concerned. The government of Czechoslovakia, and later, its Slovakian "heirs," decided to provisionally erect structures on its territory, in order to bring the power plant at Gabcikovo into operation, to improve navigability on the Danube, access to the river port at Slovakia's capital Bratislava, and to raise the groundwater level in the area. In October 1992, construction of these structures was started unilaterally, after negotiations with Hungary broke down, and was completed within weeks, in a *fait accompli*.

Hungary officially protested the action, and is still pursuing legal measures against it at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Environmentalist organizations led by the Austrian branch of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) first instigated, and later supported, Hungary's opposition to the project. Two years later, publicity around the action has calmed down, as environmental resistance faltered. This summer, the WWF officially terminated actions against Gabcikovo, after a Slovakian engineer published a report refuting its arguments and demonstrating the incompetence of the WWF's "experts."

Angelika Beyreuther-Raimondi conducted the following interview with Dr. Julius Binder, director of the state-owned company Vodohospdarska Vystavba, which built the Gabcikovo water project, on Oct. 21.

**EIR:** Given the second anniversary of the dam on the Danube River in Gabcikovo, we would like to know whether you are satisfied with the results of this major infrastructure project, with the electricity output, with the situation of the shipping on the Danube.

**Binder:** It is working exactly as we expected it would. Shipping is in order; we had only this small accident with the Russian ship. The project produces 4 billion kilowatts of energy, and the whole amount is used in Slovakia. In regard to protection of nature, the project is functioning according to plan.

Also from the ecological point of view: It is an ecological project. We can say that the riverbed is stabilized, whereas in former times it was growing deeper and deeper, because of the Austrian projects on the Danube. Since 1960, the riverbed went down 2.60 meters. Now it is no longer sinking. The level of underground water rose—in Bratislava, it rose more than 4 meters.

The branch-system of the river is in excellent condition. It is a good example of nature conservation. Birds which had not been there before, seven new species of birds, came to this area. We have 200,000 more birds in this area. There are two new arms of the Danube: On the Hungarian side, which was dry more than 80% of the year, because of the low riverbed, this Danube arm was only used to draw wastewater away from the houses. And on the Slovak side, there is a new 150 km-long arm; it too was used only for wastewater, but now it can be used for recreation.

**EIR:** If the project is so good, why is there such opposition against it?

**Binder:** The whole problem around this water project developed during the period of Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In 1922, it was decided how to divide the area. The area around the Danube was very mixed. On the right side, the Hungarian side, of the Danube, there were 450,000 Slovaks, and on the Slovak side, there were 400,000 Hungarians. Now there are only 10,000 Slovaks on the Hungarian side, and 500,000 Hungarians on the Slovak side. This is a matter of national minorities. On the Slovak side, the national minorities have minority rights, as defined by European standards. Because the Gabcikovo water project clearly defines the borders between Slovakia and Hungary, therefore the Hungarian side is against this water project. This is the only problem.

We, along with Hungarian experts, see no other problem there.

**EIR:** So from the standpoint of the technicians and engineers, also from the Hungarian side, there are no objections to the project?

**Binder:** Since 1989, all the Hungarian experts have been taken out of the project. Now the Hungarian experts are academicians, like geneticists—one expert received his doctorate by studying the dynamic reproduction of a specific wine-fly.

There was no equal partner from the Hungarian side in Strasbourg and Brussels; the Hungarian experts were replaced by experts from other professions, like geneticists

and gynecologists; that was the problem.

**EIR:** With European Commission President Jacques Delors's *White Paper*, promoting infrastructure development between East and West, did you get more backing for the project, less pressure against it?

**Binder:** Experts from all over the world are for finishing the water project. But politics is another question. Politicians don't want to burn their fingers. This concerns the interests of the West in regard to Hungary and Slovakia. I hope that the Hungarian government will have the real experts speak. I think the western partners should tell the Hungarians to finish the Nagymaros project.

If the western shipping and transport companies push for it, they will finish the project. When the embargo against former Yugoslavia is over, there will be more traffic on the Danube. Today, ships cannot be fully loaded; the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros water project would solve this problem and give 35 cm more loading depth.

We don't need to defend this project any more; it has defended itself. The people who were against the project had terrible prognoses. They said there would be ecological catastrophes, and the Hungarians based their protest on these arguments. But according to Japanese experts, in regard to the ecology of the project, it is already a project of the next century.

# LaROUCHE

YOU MAY LOVE HIM  
YOU MAY HATE HIM

BUT

YOU'D BETTER  
KNOW WHAT  
HE HAS TO SAY



The  
Power of  
Reason: 1988  
an autobiography by Lyndon H.  
LaRouche, Jr.

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## The Power of Reason: 1988

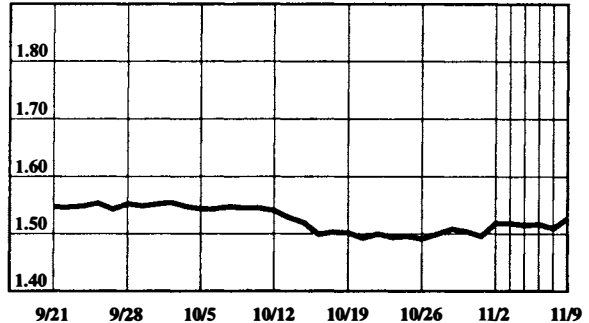
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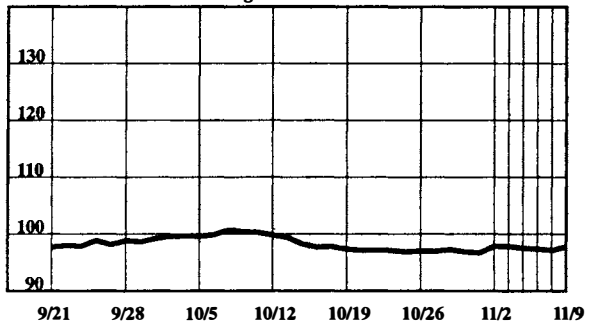
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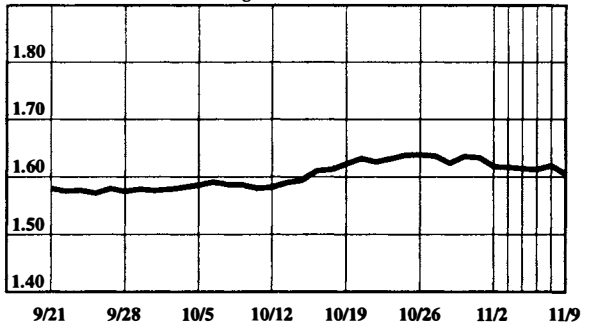
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