

## **"Military Bases Are No Solution for Jobs, Economy"**

### **People World**

The people of Groton and New London, Conn., breathed a loud collective sigh of relief last week when the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) voted to remove their naval base from the list of bases to be closed. For months, since the Pentagon's list was first published, the entire community was on edge.

The elimination of 8,000 jobs would have put a large percentage of the area's working-age population on the unemployment rolls. The future of the state's largest employer, nearby Electric Boat shipyard, owned by General Dynamics, was called into question. The ripple effect would have reached miles away. As many as 31,000 additional workers would have lost their jobs.

Suddenly, the Republican governor and the area's congressman allied with the state's Democratic senators to create "Team Connecticut." Military personnel, business leaders, unions and community agencies joined hands with one plea: Save our economy by saving the naval base.

This story was repeated in the Portsmouth, N.H./Kittery, Maine, community and across the country where base closings were announced. Some were successful in getting off the close list, others were not.

In Connecticut, the winning argument was that the synergy between the naval submarine base and the Electric Boat nuclear submarine production and repair facility made for a strong military.

However, the collective sigh of relief that the local economy was saved remains on shaky ground.

Even as families hurried to catch up and shop for back-to-school clothes, the economy remains hostage to the military-industrial complex, and could collapse at any time.

A decade ago, when the Cold War was declared over, the country was filled with the promise of a "peace dividend." Finally, it was hoped, instead of putting the nation's resources into weaponry, the pressing needs for rebuilding infrastructure and meeting social needs could be realized.

But the peace dividend itself became the first post-Cold War casualty.

For years during the nuclear weapons buildup, fears of world destruction fueled a significant movement of unions, peace groups and allies for economic conversion to peacetime production.

In the Groton/New London area, this movement became so strong that the state Legislature was pushed to offer a million-dollar check to Electric Boat to study alternative products that could be made at the nuclear submarine facility. General Dynamics simply tore up the check, proclaiming they were not interested in other production which would not yield such a high profit margin. The company then helped facilitate the defeat of their congressional district's pro-conversion

representative who had served the community so well.

Now, the BRAC hearings have temporarily rescued the production and use of nuclear submarines once again. Even as the collective cheers went up for the BRAC commission vote to save these bases, a majority of people polled in the country expressed opposition to the war on Iraq and to use of nuclear weaponry.

This episode places squarely on the agenda the question of how to achieve a truly sound economy based on fulfilling the crying needs of our country for renewable energy systems, for health care, for mass transportation, for affordable housing. The naval base and submarine production facilities could potentially be used for any of these goals.

Imagine what could be accomplished if a “Team Connecticut” came together around these priorities and pushed the federal government to fund peacetime construction that would insure a firm foundation for jobs and economic development?

The debate in military circles about which weapons are needed to combat terrorism and which are obsolete ignores the reality that none of these weapons make us more secure and most make us less secure. The Bush administration policies of never-ending war and first-strike use of nuclear weapons are clearly aimed at world domination, placing the entire planet in jeopardy.

Both the country and the world would be better served if financial, material and labor resources were devoted to meet the very real needs of the people in this country.

Thousands of communities have been thrown into crisis not only by military base closings, but also when major employers decide to close or move elsewhere for higher profits. Federal legislation to provide substantive aid to workers and communities would make it far easier to arrive at decisions regarding military bases or production facilities on the basis of what truly is in the best interests of the country, rather than blackmailing whole communities and states into supporting aggressive and destructive foreign and military policy to temporarily save jobs.

Peacetime production can be won. It will take a strong labor-peace coalition concerned with the economic well-being of working-class communities to organize mass support for a broad program to meet human needs and create millions of good jobs.

To be a world leader and truly make our country stronger requires retooling of priorities and retooling of production facilities for the people’s needs, not Pentagon and military corporation greed.

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