

Rally at Scranton's Munitions Factory Demands Peace Talks, Not Ammo, for Ukraine

by Stewart Battle

July 26—On Saturday, July 22, 2023, a modest but feisty rally took place outside of the General Dynamics munitions factory in Scranton, Pennsylvania, calling for an end of all hostilities and the commencing of peace negotiations in Ukraine. The rally was organized by a coalition of around ten peace groups, including Veterans For Peace, Pax Christi, and Ban Killer Drones, and was attended by people from across the political spectrum. The rally and speakers emphasized the need for peace in Ukraine, and called on President Joe Biden to stop sending weapons, including the recently announced cluster bombs, which are only further inflaming the crisis.

One of the demonstration's organizers, Jack Gilroy of Pax Christi, was quoted by the *Scranton Times-Tribune* as saying: "We're

taking on Scranton because that's the hometown that Joe Biden claims is his hometown, and this is a place where it's so militarized that people just kind of accept it." The Scranton Army Ammunition Plant (SCAAP), currently operated under contract with General Dynamics Ordnance, is one of the major suppliers of ammunition to Ukraine.

Another organizer, Nick Mottern of Ban Killer Drones, brought a replica of a 155mm artillery shell to the rally of the same type as is produced by the factory. "We're not helping the Ukrainian people with this sort of thing," Gilroy said. "We're doing devastation now and devastation and horror for many, many years to



Courtesy of Vera Scroggins

A peace rally at the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant—organized by a coalition from across the political spectrum—calling for an end to all hostilities in Ukraine and the start of peace negotiations. Diane Sare, LaRouche independent candidate for U.S. Senate from New York, was there to demonstrate her support (with trombone). Scranton, Pennsylvania, July 22, 2023.



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Courtesy of Vera Scroggins

“The Lackawanna Valley,” a painting by George Innis, c. 1856. Once a hub and supplier for America’s early railroad industry, Scranton, Pennsylvania’s largest employer of skilled labor today produces most of the U.S. output of 155 mm artillery shells for Ukraine in NATO’s war against Russia. At right, a peace demonstrator holds a mockup of one of those shells in one hand, and a cluster bomb component in the other.

come,” adding that the most important thing today is to avoid pushing Russia into using a nuclear weapon.

Scranton, Once a Heavy Industry Leader

Sitting in the Lackawanna Valley of northeast Pennsylvania, Scranton is today the poster-child of American rust-belt cities. It once boasted a population of 143,000 during the early 20th Century, as the region’s rich deposits of coal helped it grow into a major manufacturing hub. By 1865, Scranton’s blast furnaces were producing more iron than anywhere else in the country, making it a key hub and supplier for America’s early railroad industry. As railroads expanded through the 19th Century and into the 20th, Scranton grew rapidly. In 1880, it became one of the first cities in the world to install electric lights, followed shortly by a fully electrified trolley system that ran throughout the town. This earned it the now-famous name, “the Electric City.”

Scranton also became a central pillar in the fight against British imperial free trade policy during the late 1800s. Henry C. Carey—one of the foremost American System economists of the 19th Century, who worked with pro-national development networks around the world—formed a friendship with the prominent Pennsylvanian Terrence Powderly. Powderly, a fierce defender of labor, manufactures, and an opponent of the British Empire and its policies around the world, was elected Mayor of Scranton in 1878, putting the city on a trajectory of massive growth for the benefit of its population and industrial potential. The strength the city

and region accumulated through this kind of policy could be seen from a report published in 1906 by Scranton’s First National Bank:

One of the prime reasons for the prosperous condition of Scranton, as well as for the solidity of its banking houses, has been that no depression that has fallen upon the country has come in its excessive form upon this city. Scranton has never severely felt the great panics that have swept over the country, leaving devastation, ruin, and bankruptcy in their path, either at the time of the occurrences or while the rest of the business world was recovering from the shock and the tempest was spending its demoralizing effects. This is attributable to the peculiar conditions surrounding the city. Her values are real; they depend not upon the caprice of the speculator, and the value of her securities are sustained by innate worth and merit.

The Takedown of Scranton

Unfortunately, over the ensuing decades after World War II, the city bore the brunt of the general deindustrialization and collapse that gripped the U.S. as a whole, with railroads and factories being replaced by abandoned buildings and retail stores. Scranton today is home to 75,000 people, barely half of its former population in 1930. Its average *per capita* annual income is \$25,000, roughly two-thirds of the national average, and its poverty rate is double, at over 20%. Its School

Districts are near the bottom of national rankings. Its former industrial capacity and nearly unrivalled skilled labor pool is almost forgotten, except for one part: ammunition production.

Today, Scranton and its remaining skilled labor force are the core of U.S. production of 155 mm artillery shells for Ukraine in its war against Russia. Between Scranton's munition factory and its twin in Wilkes-Barre a few miles down the road, the two factories produce 24,000 shells every month.

Scranton's immense iron-producing factory, as described above, had been purchased in the early 20th Century by the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Company. Re-tooled, this facility became home to the production and repair of train locomotives, continuing its highly valuable role as a major producer in the country. In 1951, this 495,000 square foot factory

through trade and export—they produce bomb casings that go on to kill and maim thousands in perpetuation of the Anglo-American unipolar hegemony.

The Saturday July 22 rally pointed a finger at this grave travesty, even if the speakers did not elaborate on the plant's full historical drama. They repeatedly called on the U.S. to take the side of peace, ending the lucrative but destructive arms sales to Ukraine, and to work instead to bring the two countries—Ukraine and Russia—to the negotiating table.

In one particularly fun moment, an individual wearing a Joe Biden mask arrived (Biden is, after all, from Scranton), and asked forgiveness for having gone along with the destruction brought upon Ukraine. Shortly thereafter, Pope Francis appeared (also in the form of a masked individual) and forgave President Biden, who then proceeded to lie prostrate in front of the gates of



Courtesy of Vera Scroggins

As part of the July 22 peace rally, three demonstrators stage a “die-in” at the gates of the Scranton Army Ammunition Plant.



EIRNS/Michelle Erin

The July 22 peace rally heard a diversity of speakers from a coalition of ten organizations—all emphasizing the need for peace in Ukraine and calling on the President to stop sending weapons.

changed its purpose again, and was purchased by the Army to become a site dedicated to military production. It is this same factory which, in 2006, was purchased by General Dynamics, and today is the major producer of 155mm artillery shells in the U.S.

Build Peace, Build Scranton

Though the factory is small, employing only about 300 workers, they are highly skilled, some even are descendants of workers at that same factory, going back to when it still produced and repaired steam locomotives and rolling stock. Still holding on, maintaining a continuity of a skilled workmanship that is vital to any modern nation today, these workers are an epitome of the tragedy that is today's America. Rather than using their talents to build their nation—or even other nations

the munitions factory, writhing in agony for his “sins.” Apparently President Biden was officially invited to attend the demonstration but declined to show up—luckily someone stood in for him.

Signs dotted the demonstration, reading “No NATO, No War,” “Joe Biden, Warmonger, Eco-terrorist,” “60 Years Ago, He [picture of JFK] Knew How To Stop Nuclear War,” “Abolish War Before It Abolishes Us,” “There is no joy in nuclear weapons,” and more.

This rally, though small, was another step toward the building of an international chorus for peace. It is high time that Scranton's SCAAP General Dynamics factory, and America at large, resume their rightful roles as producers of and contributors to a world that sees war as wholly unacceptable, and economic collaboration as the way forward in peace.