

# Military conversion no easy task

BY DAWN BUIE

## Canadian University Press

WINNIPEG — As contracts for military goods and services shrink worldwide, peace groups and military industrialists are searching for ways to adapt military factories and bases.

The Manitoba-based Economic Conversion Committee says converting them to fulfill peaceful functions is the route to go.

Cec Muldrew, president of Veterans Against Nuclear War and an ECC member, said there is opposition to conversion in Canada because workers and companies are afraid of losing jobs and profits.

Muldrew points to conversion success stories in the United States, where former military bases have been turned into schools.

The federal government provides \$300 million annually to industries that convert to military production, but offers no incentives for conversion to civilian production, he said.

He said more jobs are created in health or education than defence with the same amount of money.

Federal NDP defence critic John Brewin said changes have to be made or else the unemployment rolls will swell.

"The defence industry has a very uncertain future," he said. "If we don't have conversion we are going to have job losses."

The defence industry currently employs 300,000 people, and the number of people in the armed forces will be reduced over the next three years to 76,000 from 84,000.

Brewin said public hearings should be held to discuss Canadian defence policy, and these discussions should encompass the question of unnecessary military bases.

"Where bases are to be closed, we need reasonable conversion or compensation for individuals and families," he added.

Paul Buteau, of the strategic studies department at the University of Manitoba, said Canada will not benefit by building its own submarines and frigates, because they can be purchased for less elsewhere.

Buteau also said Canada's defence industry is in trouble because defence spending is down, particularly in the United States, where 84 per cent of Canada's defence exports go.

"[Canada] would be hard put to keep the defence sector going at its existing level," he said.

Officials at the Department of National

Defence know they have to close down army bases to make up for capital purchases, Buteau said.

"What stops them has nothing to do with military considerations or the efficient use of funds, it's purely political because of the effect on particular local communities," he said.

Harry Aitkenhead was a union representative at the Portage La Prairie military base in Manitoba, which was slated to close but was converted into a civilian flight-training school.

Aitkenhead said the school is temporary and 55 employees will eventually lose their jobs.

"What we had proposed was long term — a high-tech training school for airplane builders," he said.

The Shilo base in Brandon, Manitoba is also scheduled to close, which will have a significant impact on the local economy, Buteau said. The ECC wants the base converted to a solar energy research site, but no plans have been made.



## The defence industry is coming to town

BY M. J. HAMILTON

IF YOUR TOWN was dying and an industry called ADIL (Atlantic Defence Industry Limited) was planning to come to your area, would you say, "No way! I don't want any type of militarization in my town!" Would you stage a protest? Or would you write a letter to your local MP expressing your gratitude for creating jobs so that you would not have to move away from the town that you were born and raised in? It seems the idea of having economic security and jobs (by making items for defence) far outweigh the idea that your town would be supporting milita-

zation. In 1985, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia lost one of its main industries, Acadian Distillers which employed about 70 people. This may not sound like many people to some, but to a town of about 1,200 people (where everyone knows each other like family), this is an important part of the working population.

Bridgetown immediately began looking for another industry to take Acadian Distillers' place. But it's hard to entice an industry to start a plant in a small town in the Annapolis Valley. When ADIL expressed interest in starting a plant in Bridgetown, the town jumped at the chance.

The townspeople were encouraged to write to their local MP to tell him how excited they were that ADIL was interested in coming to their area and what it would mean to them. Even some class time was devoted to students'

preparation of letters.

In the town's October 14, 1987 weekly newspaper, the *Monitor*, a comment told townspeople to write letters. It read, "It's obvious from the excitement over the latest news of the possible federal defence contract, that Bridgetown and area want ADIL to come to the Friendly Town. The voice of the people has worked before, so why not give him [your MP] some more ammunition [sic] to work with... Let them know—'ADIL We Think You're Swell!'"

Not everyone knew what

ADIL was, or even what the acronym stood for. Their main concern was that

ADIL might keep people in the town. Bill Hamilton, Town Clerk of Bridgetown, said even if they knew that ADIL made parts for gas tanks and pontoon bridges, "they didn't equate that with a munitions plant or things of that nature... It wasn't a moral issue. It was an issue of economics and employment."

Louise Foley, President of the Student Council at Bridgetown Regional High School at that time, said she knew what ADIL was, and that they were making parts for large machinery for military purposes. ADIL made three components for trucks: load-handling systems, bridge adapter pallets, and flat racks, which were to be distributed across Canada for the Department of National Defence (DND).

Foley said, "The only thing I was interested in was Bridgetown staying alive. It was the only industry willing to come into the area... If another industry was

offering to come to our area, maybe we would have looked at what ADIL stood for more closely."

"Students were told, 'Write a letter or your town will die.' The students were given class time (about 30 minutes) to write the

letter," Foley added. "I don't know of anyone that consciously did not write a letter except for those who didn't care."

### MORE DID YOU KNOW...?

1. "America's latest war killed at least 100,000 Iraqis and bombed the country back to what one United Nations report described as 'a pre-industrial age.' But unlike Vietnam and virtually every other conflict in which huge numbers of American troops have been used for conventional war, this time U.S. casualties were extraordinarily light—fewer than 150 Americans lost their lives." (*The Progressive*, May 1991)

2. "At least 170,000 children under five will die in the coming year from the delayed effects of the Gulf Crisis." (*Guardian Weekly*, November, 1991)

3. "The Bush Administration rejects responsibility for the increase of Iraqi infant deaths from malnutrition, insisting that ample food was available but that Saddam Hussein's government was blocking distribution... All UN assessments

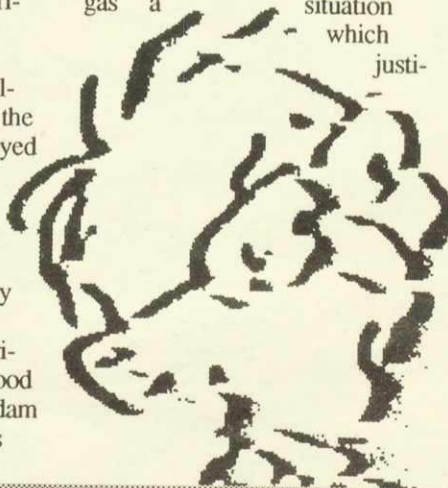
to date indicate that what little food there is available is being distributed by the government equally throughout Iraq regardless of ethnic/religious background." (*Guardian Weekly*, November 1991)

4. "Approximately 2,500

U.S. soldiers filed for conscientious objector status [during the Gulf War]." (fifth estate, late summer 1991)

5. "...Sylvester Stallone had turned down an invitation from Marine Commandant Alfred Gray, Jr. to entertain the troops in the Gulf.

Said Rambo: 'No, I won't go... I don't think what's going on over there is right. So, why go over there and support it? Is the fact that we're going to pay more for gas a situation which justifies



### DID YOU KNOW?

6. "In San Francisco, a 'Welcome Home the Troops' parade, which was intended by its organ-

izers to overcome the civic 'shame' of having the city be the scene of several 100,000+ anti-war demonstrations and thousands of arrests, drew only 25,000." (fifth estate, late summer 1991)

7. "An estimated 4 to 8 million barrels of oil was spilt into the sea, over 700 burning oil wells caused atmospheric pollution, oil lakes and oil rivers. Bombs and movements of troops and machinery damaged the desert." (*Greenpeace*)

8. "Soot has been found in the snows of the Himalayas, and in the rain in Turkey, Iran, Oman, and the southern Soviet Union." (*Greenpeace*)

9. "A 12-year old boy pretending to be George Bush died after being struck by a rock thrown by a playmate who took the role of Saddam Hussein, a Bangladesh newspaper reported... At least 100 adults were watching the boys, who pretended to be enemies in the Persian Gulf war."

(*Globe and Mail*, 25 February 1991, A11)

10. "In 1992 the United States is planning \$33 billion in arms sales and \$22 billion of that is going to the Middle East." (Tariq Rauf, Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament)