

# PROTESTING WAR PROFITEERS



Photo by Victoria Estes

## Rejecting Raytheon in Asheville

Imagine our surprise when we learned in October that our county, state, and local Chamber of Commerce had been negotiating with Raytheon for over 15 months to build a Pratt & Whitney plant in Asheville, North Carolina. Pratt & Whitney builds engines for the F-35s, as well as for commercial aircraft. In November, VFP members showed up at the one and only county commissioners' hearing on the matter, along with members of the Sunrise Movement and the Democratic Socialists of America, only to have our 30 dissenting testimonies disregarded and a unanimous vote taken to give P&W a \$27 million tax incentive to locate here.

The bait for the local acquiescence was the promise of 800 pretty well-paying jobs, a bonanza for our pandemic-struck tourist economy. And of course there was the usual talk about how this 1.2 million-square-foot plant on 100 acres of prime forest land would serve as a catalyst for further economic development in the area.

With outrage and a sense of betrayal, we who testified formed a coalition to oppose this steamroller of a project, calling ourselves Reject Raytheon AVL. We set up social media sites, wrote letters to the editor and opinion pieces, continued to show up at the county commissioners' meetings voicing our outrage, and conducted a die-in in the town center. We went out to the land being stripped for the plant, took pictures and got them out in public for people to see what looks like another mountaintop removal project here in Appalachia.

Our concerns are about bringing Raytheon—a war profiteer—to our community, especially in light of its sales of equipment to Saudi Arabia for use in its genocide in Yemen. And we also oppose investing in a multinational aerospace and defense corporation whose business model depends on the ravenous use of fossil fuels in this time of climate emergency. Then there is the

polluting of the French Broad River that is bound to happen from the use of toxic chemicals and sedimentation run-off. The traffic tie-ups on the road leading to the entrance of the plant is yet another issue. As well, opportunities have been lost to invest in local businesses and to deliver on promises of reparations to our African-American community.

We are only two months into our movement at this point and plan to keep at our resistance for the long haul. We may or may not be able to stop Raytheon from moving here, but we can expose them for who they are and what they do. We can use Raytheon to raise people's consciousness, and consciences, about the extractive role of these huge defense contractors in our economy, the wars and the migration they fuel, and the immorality of our own complicity with them. And that's exactly what we mean to do.

—Ken Jones, VFP # 099, Asheville, NC