

Drones in US: Should We Question Who Really Benefits?

by Ed Kinane, Reprinted from Truthout.org

On December 30, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) designated six US regions as test sites for the domestic development of drone technology. One of those regions includes Syracuse, NY, my hometown. We “host” the Hancock Air Base 174th Attack Wing, now piloting weaponized Reaper drones over Afghanistan.

Here in the United States, the multibillion-dollar drone industry generates an enormous amount of hype. Various corporations stand to make huge profits, not only from ongoing military contracts, but increasingly from the domestic and commercial development of drones.

This is why industry lobbyists have recruited the two Congressional drone caucuses. Here in Central New York, we have Senators Schumer and Gillibrand and Representative Maffei parroting the drone corporation line.

In applauding the FAA decision, these politicians dangle the promise of lots more “jobs” and “money” coming our way. So it’s time to press the skeptic button:

- Who is making those glowing estimates? What interest might they have in exaggerating them?
- Who will get those jobs? How many will be high-tech jobs going to those already comfortably placed to take on new contracts?
- Who gets to ride first class on the gravy train? Will that income go to local folks . . . or will the lion’s share go as profit to CEOs and investors?

Drones are robots, mindless and heartless, mostly designed to

surveil and assassinate. Who benefits from having robots further infiltrate the workplace? Robots don't have mouths to feed, don't need wages, health and unemployment insurance, pensions. They don't need workplace safety. Robots never blow the whistle when their bosses skirt the law or abuse the environment. They don't join pesky unions.

Who benefits from having robots do the work? Certainly not those whose jobs are made obsolete. Remember how the wonders of automation decimated the ranks of blue- and pink-collar workers? If Amazon Inc. really does begin to deliver books and other products via drone, might that not mean fewer jobs for truck drivers and postal workers?

Recall the 1950s' "Atoms for Peace" hype. With nuclear energy, electricity would be "too cheap to meter." Sounded great, right? But those corporados and their Congressional pals pushing nuclear energy forgot to tell us that the toxic, radioactive nuclear waste can't be disposed of safely. They didn't warn us about the Three Mile Islands or the Fukushima waiting in the wings. Nor did they acknowledge that so much of that nuclear research our taxes were funding was going into nuclear weapon development – making every living thing on the planet less safe.

Nor are the weaponized drones, for all their short-term tactical cleverness, making the world safer. Like the nuke, they terrorize. They too proliferate, generating fear and blowback.

In this age of NSA global surveillance, both targeted and indiscriminate, it's disturbing that our Congress people seem so eager to sell down the river not only our privacy, but our safety. We may or may not trust Mr. Obama, but we need to consider that subsequent presidents may be even less sensitive to civil liberties and constitutional issues.

We need to recall that some presidents within the last

generation or so were more than willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of lives "over there." Can we be sure they will always make that dicey distinction between "over there" and "here?" Can we be sure future presidents won't also see some classes of people here as "other," as expendable? Do we really want to give any government, any fallible human beings, such power?

Ed Kinane, along with 15 other Upstate Drone Action members, faces trial in the DeWitt, NY, Town Court for protesting the Reaper drone killings in Afghanistan originating at the Hancock air base Attack Wing. The proceedings began January 3.