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The annual anti-war demonstration sponsored by the San Diego Coalition for Peace and Justice (SDCPJ) in mid-March had a markedly different tone this year from the actions in 2009 and 2010. Then the protesters and rally speakers had soft-pedaled criticism of President Obama, still holding out hope that he would fulfill his campaign promise to end the U.S. occupation of Iraq and would come to realize that the war in Afghanistan — already America's longest-lasting combat — was unwinnable and would withdraw there, too. Instead, Obama chose the eighth anniversary of former President George W. Bush's attack on Iraq to launch U.S. air raids on Libya, thereby getting us involved in a third war against a Muslim country — and one young man at the rally summed up the attitude of most of the 300 people there by wearing a T-shirt with the famous Shepard Fairey image of Obama, and under it the words "War Criminal."

The anti-Obama hard line was apparent from the speeches at the rally, too. "Barack Obama is a war criminal," said Hugh Moore, who as the representative of the Green Party couldn't resist the temptation to remind the crowd that he hadn't voted for Obama. "And I am a war criminal, too," Moore added, "because I pay taxes and support this regime."

Though nominally an anti-war demonstration, both the speeches and the protesters' signs linked the war to virtually the entire array of Left-wing causes. Many of the speakers pointed to the huge amounts of money being spent on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and how those sums, if spent at home instead, could pay for universal health care and other social programs both federal and state governments are relentlessly cutting. Others linked the wars to the crisis in Wisconsin, where Republican governor Scott Walker pushed through his state's legislature a bill that virtually eliminates public employee unions' ability to represent and advocate for workers, and to the similar budget crisis in California, where governor Jerry Brown and a Democrat-controlled state legislature can't find two Republican votes in each house to put on the ballot a measure to continue the state's current sales and car license taxes.

"We have spent \$1.3 trillion on these wars," said Barry Lambdendorf, president of the San Diego chapter of Veterans for Peace. "For that money, we could provide 60 million people with scholarships for four years in the university. We could give 250 million people health care for one year. In Wisconsin, the state budget deficit is \$3 billion — about what we spend on the wars in one week. In California, our proportionate share of these wars is \$160 billion per year. The

state's budget shortfall is \$27 billion. We're told 'there isn't enough money,' but there's always enough money to give tax cuts to the rich and subsidize the oil companies. There's enough money to bail out Wall Street, but not enough for health care, education, infrastructure, or rebuilding our inner cities, we're told. But we always have money for perpetual war."

Lambdendorf also mentioned the even grimmer cost of the wars in human life. "Six thousand men and women have died, 43,000 have been seriously wounded and one-third to one-fourth of all those who have served in the last 10 years have post-traumatic stress disorder," he said. "According to one study, 650,000 people have been killed in Iraq, and every day the U.S. issues an apology to Pakistan and Afghanistan for killing civilians in drone attacks. Every time we do this, we create more enemies, and the U.S.'s standing in the world goes down."

Zahi Damuni of the San Diego branch of Al-Awda, the coalition of Palestinians and others calling for the "right of return" of Palestinians whose families were driven out of Israel since the Zionist state was founded in 1948, was the first speaker who announced to the crowd that U.S. bombing raids on Libya had begun that very day. He said that the raids on Libya, and the invasion of Bahrain by the Saudi Arabian military to suppress citizen protests similar to those that brought down dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, "tell you a lot" about the U.S.'s role in the Middle East.

"U.S. support for [deposed Egyptian president Hosni] Mubarak for 30 years was supposed to be forgotten," Damuni said. "The regime in Egypt is a military dictatorship funded by the U.S. with \$1.3 billion per year, and this regime has suppressed the people for demonstrating for Palestine and against the hermetic seal of Gaza" — the blockade, maintained jointly by Israel and Egypt, to starve the Palestinians of Gaza into submission and impose collective punishment on them (banned by international law) for having dared to elect Hamas to govern them. "The straw that broke the camel's back [in Egypt] was the economy and the difference between the handful of very rich people at the top and the overwhelming majority of poor people making about \$2 per day. This led to one of the most historic revolutions of all time."

Other speakers pointed out that the distribution of wealth and income in the U.S. is becoming more unequal and approaching the level of Egypt. Dr. Jeff Gordon, a veteran physician and activist who served on the California Medical Board during Jerry Brown's first governorship in the 1970's and 1980's, said he took care of veterans with PTSD, drug addiction and suicidal tendencies. "I also have patients suffering from economic disease," he said. "I live in a world of trauma and tragedy. I want to talk about the pain on the streets. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are one problem, but this country stands on the precipice of social and economic collapse. The problem is the strangulation and death of the American middle class."

Gordon bolstered his matter-of-fact presentation with a blizzard of statistics showing that over the last 30 years, the U.S. economy has doubled in size but virtually all the extra wealth and income generated by that growth has gone to the fraction of the population at the top. "Today a 30-year-old male, if he's lucky enough to have a job at all, is earning about what a 30-year-old male made 30 years ago," he said. "The top 150,000 households in the U.S. make more money than the bottom 120 million." He blamed this on Ronald Reagan and every president since, both Republicans and Democrats, pointing out that economic policies for the last 30 years have

steadily cut taxes for the rich and deregulated the economy — and that continues even though those policies caused the 2008 depression.

One of the measurements Gordon cited to document America's growing economic inequality is called the "Gini coefficient," after the Italian statistician and sociologist Corrado Gini, who published the concept in 1912. Gordon explained that a society in which everybody had exactly the same income would have a Gini coefficient of 0, while one in which one person had all the income would have a Gini coefficient of 1. He said that the most egalitarian country in the world is Sweden, with a Gini coefficient of .25. "Currently, the U.S. has a Gini coefficient of .45," Gordon explained. "Canada's is .32, Great Britain's is .34, Russia's is .42. Even before its revolution, Egypt had a distribution of .34. The U.S.'s income inequality is approaching that of Costa Rica, .46; Argentina, .46; Ecuador, .48; and that poor country down the street, Mexico, which is .48."

What all this means, Gordon said, is "while you've been hanging around the last 10 years, America has become a banana republic. We are totally in thrall to the caudillos. Beware: we are on the cusp of fascism: a subjectivist, nationalistic, authoritarian form of government, which will be based on violence and for the benefit of the business class. I hope the turmoil in Wisconsin politics and the turnout on the street there represents the start of an awakening of the American public to the false premises of the destructive Midwest and Southern Republicans."