

East Bay Peace Action
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Post Election Analysis: Advancing a People's Agenda

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The following is a transcription of a talk given 11/11/18 for members of East Bay Peace Action. It has been lightly edited for clarity.



Eric See grew up in the 1980s and became increasingly aware, like most children in that period, of dangers of nuclear war. He became a peace activist during the first Iraq war in 1990 while attending the University of Pennsylvania. Upon graduation, Eric See began working for California Peace Action and has been with the organization through its various name changes, [It is now the West Coast office of national Peace Action; the other office is in Maryland]. Has worn many hats at the organization: directing grassroots membership campaigns, being the finance director and most recently coordinating the national grassroots campaign to pass the Iran nuclear deal.

Eric See:

I was thinking about the one-hundredth anniversary of the Armistice Day at the end of World War I. You know, of course, the U.S. changed this to Veterans Day in 1954, I believe, switching it from a day honoring

peace specifically at the end of WWI to one that, and this is at the height of the Cold War in 1954, the Korean War, and this is a way to honor the troops, but also to talk about the continued need for war, and wrap the idea of war being kind of a constant in our society. Also, thinking about the hundredth year and being recorded, there is an actual recording of the actual end of WWI and the end of the shooting. I don't know if anyone has heard that recording.

Audience member: Yes, it was on the radio this morning.

Eric See: Yes, it was on the radio this morning. It's really eerie. You hear the gunshots and the cannon fire, and the noise of war and then on the exact minute that armistice is declared, there is this complete silence as the guns stop shooting, as the cannons stop shooting. The transition from the sounds of war to the sound of peace, which is just very tranquil.

Audience member: They were screaming "fini la guerre."

Eric See: Yes. And people then began cheering and jumping up and down. This is also the day that Trump was going to have his giant military parade through Washington D. C., which

thankfully got cancelled. So instead, you know, he is making himself look like a fool over in Europe right now—hiding out from a light drizzle and thinking that the Baltic States were the ones that caused WWI, blaming Ferdinand the Bold and other things like that. You know, our president at his finest moments.

Midterm Election

So, Betty wanted me to talk about a people's agenda, a peace agenda moving forward, and I think this is a really appropriate time. Here we are in a post-midterm world—the first national election since Trump took office. So, in effect, this is the first national referendum on Trump and his policies. And while I don't think it was quite the overwhelming blue tsunami, blue wave that everyone anticipated, it was still quite dramatic—40 representatives across the country flipping from Republican to Democrat, millions and millions, an unprecedented voter turnout that we hadn't seen in a long time in this country.

Split Congress

We knew that the Democrats were never going to retake the Senate. It was stacked against them this time around, based on one-third of the Senate gets re-elected each two years. This particular third of the Senate was most likely . . . it was going to be Democrats that hold the really challenging seats that were going to have to face re-election. So we knew that the Democrats were not going to retake the Senate. But the Democrats did end up taking the House. So we have a split Congress.

Some people ask me on staff “well, what does this mean? A split Congress means that there is going to be gridlock in D.C.” and I said, “Yes! There is going to be gridlock in D.C. and this is a good thing.” Because gridlock means that Trump's agenda is going to be harder to pass through Congress. He is going to have to rely on only on executive actions to really move things forward. He can't expect a Congress to rubber-stamp his decisions anymore from this term. So this is a really good thing. Gridlock is . . . , sometimes gridlock can be a good thing. It means it's an obstacle to the worst things Trump can accomplish. Now it also means that it's going to be hard for us progressives forces to accomplish things ourselves. But sometimes stopping bad can be an accomplishment in and of itself.

Midterm Endorsements

Another thing people ask is “what does Peace Action, as a National Organization, do in this election?” Because Peace Action across the country and a lot of our affiliates worked pretty heavily in the elections. We knew that this was going to be a big midterm election. So we started working about seven months ago. We were going to spend a lot of our political time and energy working on these elections because this is the direction the country is going right now. Everyone is focused on these elections for most of the year. So we fundraised. We have a PAC. We raised some money so we could spend money.

We sent out questionnaires, candidate questionnaires to every member of Congress we could find, every Democrat running, and some Republicans as well, and some Green Party members. Usually we send out about 50 questionnaires in a midterm election. This time around we sent out 335. It was an unprecedented number of people running. And people were coming from out of the woodwork in every single district all over the Country. People who were new to politics, people who were running for the first time at the congressional level, people who were just moved based on the amount of outrage about what Trump was doing for the last 2 years.

People were saying “I need to stand up and run for Congress.” And so there were a lot of unknowns.

So at Peace Action we don't give out our endorsements willy-nilly. We have a pretty intense process. We have a questionnaire. If they are an incumbent they have to vote with us 90 percent of the time or better. Give them one or two mulligans, but pretty much they have to be with us 100 percent of the time.

If they are not an incumbent then we give them a questionnaire, a 15 question questionnaire. It's an open book test. We give them the right answer. They don't have to agree with the right answer. They can write down whatever they want, but we say “this is what we think you should be doing.” So if we get those back--out of the 335 we sent we got 85 back--out of that, people who got 100% right, who really were excited about our endorsement, we endorsed. We want peace champions in office. This is our time. This is our chance to make sure there are peace champions representing us across the Country.

So of the 40 brand new Democrats in office as of this January, when they get signed in, the people who won, next Tuesday they all go to D.C. where they learn about being a congressperson. You know where the restrooms are, where the office is, what the wifi password is--all these sorts of things. Then you know it takes a while before they actually get sworn in. So of the 40 brand new Democrats, Peace Action worked on 8 of them--8 races. So you can do the math--it's 20 percent of the people that came into office, this blue wave, were people who are peace champions who Peace Action felt strongly enough about to endorse.

Audience member: Did they win?

Eric See: All those 8? Yes. One we just found out about--was it this morning? Yesterday? was Harley Rouda down in Orange County, that Dana Rohrabacher, who had been in the office [audience murmurs and applause] Yes! He'd been in office for decades. He started as a speechwriter for Ronald Reagan

Audience member: Rohrabacher, not Rouda?

Eric See: Rohrabacher not Rouda. [Rouda] passed our endorsement with flying colors. He answered all of our questions. He really does want to become a peace champion. And I was so glad. I did a lot of work calling people and doing voter I.D. on that campaign. So it was really nice to see. It was very, very close. We knew it was going to be within 1,000 votes. That's what I was telling people on the phone you need to go to the poll because this election could be decided by 300 votes; that means you could be one of the 300 people that decide this.” And people got motivated because their vote actually did count. It was really important that they turn out. So I'm glad he won and beat the recount.

Cultivating Peace Champions

So where does this leave us now? We have a split Congress that, like I said, “Gridlock! Yes!” You like gridlock. So if you look at some of the issues we are working on . . . I put some of our policy on the back [table] there. I think I made 30 copies each. They are little 2-pagers we give to members of Congress. So if you want to know what Harley Rouda is going to be getting from Peace Action, he'll be getting those, although there will probably be printed on a little better paper stock, but it's the same words as he'll be getting when we meet with him. Because we have a chance, an opportunity, and we have a real challenge right now.

The opportunity is that we have all these fresh, young, new faces coming into Congress, who are starting off their political careers, may it be 2 years, may it be 40 years. But coming out what was this election about? What is the mandate that these members of Congress got into office on across the country? What were the main issues? Well, healthcare was probably the biggest issue in the country. Being against Trump, being pro-immigration, being pro the women's movement. These were the movements that were . . . being in favor of science and the science around climate change--these were the issues that mostly were the waves that got most of the people on the Congress. The peace wave was probably not the biggest wave. So we have a real challenge right now.

These new members of Congress, although they said they want to be peace champions, there are going to be a lot of people tapping them on the shoulder to talk to them about their agenda. And we need to make sure the peace agenda is somewhere at the top of their list: That they are informed. That they know about the state of play of all the different issues that we work on. They know what legislation is being moved forward, what isn't. They know the whole system of voting on the military budget works, all the amendment structures--everything. They need to really get on board and brought into a moving train of what the peace movement has been doing for the last 60 years. But definitely over the last 5 years--what the peace movement has been doing. So that is our opportunity and our challenge.

So our work didn't stop on Election Day. It just kind of changed gears. We need to pivot a bit. Now we need to focus on building relations with all these new members of Congress that we helped work to get into office.

Stopping the War in Yemen

So what are we going to be talking to them about? What is our agenda? Well for Peace Action, probably immediately the big agenda is stopping the war in Yemen. You all have been paying attention to that. This is a fast moving train. So without giving too much background, right now there is a bill in the House that is being introduced, it is House Concurrent Resolution 138, H.Con.Res.138. This is introduced by . . . well the lead author is Representative Ro Khanna [from] down in San Jose/Fremont, but it has a number of other original co-sponsors. This is a bill to stop the U.S. from supporting and engaging with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab emirates, the coalition that is right now engaged in basically slaughter of people in Yemen. So it is a war powers resolution. Something that as peace activists we fought for back in the 70s to get the War Powers Act signed into place. This is one of the first time that it is potentially being used.

Audience member: Could you remind us about the War Powers Act?

Eric See: The War Powers Act says that . . . it kind of reminds the government that in the Constitution who declares war is Congress. It's not an executive decision. It's a congressional decision. So the War Powers Act forces that not just, as mentioned "hey, you know, the constitution says this thing." It says that any member of Congress can introduce a piece of legislation, it must be voted on in 30 days—so it's a privileged resolution. It bumps up against everything else. And it's the right of Congress to vote up or down whether to support any kind of military action the President has decided on. So the President has basically about 30 days to have a military action. If anything last longer than 30 days, then Congress has the right to vote on it, to decide whether we continue or not.

Audience member: But we provide most all of the weapons that are killing these people and destroying all of their cities.

Eric See: Absolutely.

Audience member: And then, right now, the whole place is wiped out and no food, no water, no nothing. Is then is that included—you know quickly?

Eric See: Absolutely. It's saying no shipping of arms, no refueling of planes, no sharing of military intelligence, no U.S. soldiers on the ground. Basically that we do not support this particular war. The bill does not say the United States will not sell weapons to Saudi Arabia ever again. That a separate issue. This is specifically around the weapons of war they are using right now. Because, as we know, Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest purchasers of U.S. weapons, if not the biggest purchaser. And as Trump said, "that's a lot of money." And that's important. That was his response to the killing of the journalist. He said, "Well, Saudi Arabia, they buy a lot of weapons," which is interesting. It's interesting to have a President who says something that blatant. It's nice to unveil the curtain and say "this is how power actually works." This is how some of his decisions work. So sometimes it's a certain blessing about having someone be so blatant and not having to worry about offending anyone. So times he says trues that other people would not want be said. Of course he doesn't realize that he's doing it.

So this is the second time this bills been introduced. It was introduced last September. And Ro Khanna was a brand new representative. In fact we worked on his campaign and I went to his first town hall meeting where he started talking about the war in Yemen. This is the issue that he really cared about. I was [thinking] I'm really glad you are in office. His first act was to introduce this bill on the war in Yemen. But as a brand new representative he really didn't understand the process. Let's just say it didn't turn out the way he wanted because he really didn't work with the Democratic Party leadership He didn't really know who his allies were, who his opponents were. He didn't know a lot about the legislative process, and eventually the Republican Party de-privileged the resolution. They said "well it's not really a war." He had no one to argue on his behalf and the bill got turned into just vote for the... the general sense of Congress. So the bill, which was voted on in the spring in the House of Representatives, said: Is it the sense of Congress that the U.S. should not be supporting the war in Yemen? Not that we would stop it. Not that it would change anything. Not that it would change the amount of weapons we were sending, or the intelligence or anything else. Just "yes or no, do you think the war in Yemen, do you think we should be supporting it?" So how do you think this bill--just a vote on conscience in Congress [did]?

Audience member: Went down.

Eric See: It *passed*. All the Democrats and most of the Republicans voted and said "yes, we shouldn't be involved in this war." Think about it. When it came time to actually making a decision to actually stop the weapons, they didn't want to vote on it. It was just your personal opinion. What do you think? Should we be involved in this war? Overwhelming support.

Audience member: What were the numbers again?

Eric See: 336 said yes [we shouldn't be involved in the war in Yemen] Think about it. That's almost every single Republican voted "yes, we should be out of this war," every single Democrat

saying “yes we should be out of this war.” But when it came time to actually do something about it nobody wanted to do anything about it. Why?

Audience member: What about the Senate?

Eric See: It didn't happen in the Senate. It's going to get voted on probably this fall in the Senate. That's being pushed by Bernie Sanders and some others. So this tells you how important those weapons sales are and that influence is of Saudi Arabia. That vote, when it happened, the Saudi Arabian government was so afraid of this vote, that they hired an additional 200 lobbyists just for that month to go ahead and meet with members of Congress. The Pentagon had a private meeting with members of Congress that they would not allow journalists or people like Peace Action to actually attend, where they gave a closed-door lobbying meeting about why the U.S. needs to support the war in Yemen.

We got wind of this and we were outside the door of the hearing. We were the only ones there. Paul Martin, our political director, heard about it. And so he happened to have some literature, which he had sitting out there. He ran upstairs and he was handing out our literature to everyone as they were going into this closed-door meeting at the Pentagon. And then the security shooed him away. But that's what they were afraid of. They were afraid of people hearing and talking about the truth.

So this [introduction of legislation] is the second time around. The first time just became a vote of conscience. The second time around, now Ro Khanna -- a year under his belt -- a little less wet behind the ears, a little more sage wisdom from colleagues and friends, he went and met with the Democratic party leadership, he went and met with a lot of other people and talked with a whole host of people to help introduce the bill.

So who did he have introduced the bill with him? He had Representative Adam Smith from up in Washington. He will be the Democratic head of the House Armed Services Committee. Elliot Engel, House Foreign Affairs Committee. Steny Hoyer. He's got the entire Democratic Party leadership co-sponsoring this bill. And now, especially after the bombing, the school bombing, and the killing of the journalist, the Democratic Party has said this is going to be one of their main issues to push on in the next calendar year. So this bill will get a vote. It will probably get a vote next week because it was introduced before the election and time is running out by the end of the year. Congress is only going to be in session another 4 weeks before the winter holidays. So it will probably get voted if not this week then early the week after.

Audience member: And the bill number again?

Eric See: It is H.Con.Res.138. And the Senate Bill is Senate Bill 54. And that will get introduced immediately after.

Audience member: Is this conscience again, or is this more?

Eric See: This is the real deal. Now this is still a Republican-controlled Congress. But so far we have four Republican cosponsors. We haven't been lobbying any of the Democrats anymore. They're all on our side. We've been meeting with and lining up members of the Republican Party and getting them to co-sponsor. We have four that have publicly co-sponsored. We have a number—about 12 who say they will probably, they will vote yes, but they don't want to put

their name and co-sponsor yet. We have another 12 that are on the fence. It has a chance—even with the Republican Congress right now—to pass.

Audience member: Is the Senate Bill identical?

Eric See: Pretty much identical. The Senate Bill probably has a little harder chance of passing. If I was going to guess, I would say it will pass in the House, and maybe we will lose it in the Senate very closely.

Audience member: Can you give us the wording of what it is promoting?

Eric See: I don't have the exact wording.

Audience member: I mean the sense of it.

Eric See: The sense of it, yes, is directing the President to remove United States armed forces from hostilities in the Republic of Yemen that have not been authorized by Congress. Basically get the U.S. out of the war in Yemen.

Audience member: And what is the number again?

Eric See: It is H.Con.Res. 138.

Audience member: But there is no Senate Bill yet?

Eric See: The senate bill is Senate Bill 54. The policy papers in the back [of the room] have the numbers. I encourage people to grab those.

This went from a war that was completely forgotten about, that no one talked about. How long has this war been going on? Several years now? The U.N. called it the forgotten war. During the whole first year of the Trump presidency, what number of times did MSNBC cover the war in Yemen? Does anyone want to take a guess how many times? Zero.

It is an unmitigated humanitarian disaster—what's happening. And there is about half of the country, which is about 13 million people, that are on the brink of starvation. And they are already saying it is the worst famine in the last 100 years.

Audience member: And no water.

Eric See: And no water. Part of the reason is all of the desalinization plants have been blown up. There is not a lot of ground water in Yemen, so they have to rely a lot on desalinization plants to take the salt water and convert it to potable water, which had slowly been built up by NGOs. Various European nations have supplied parts and what have you for the desalinization. But they just sit there and they are big, easy targets. Have they are targets of war for the Saudi bombers.

If the U.S. pulls out, chances are of the war, although we are supplying the weapons and the intelligence and the refueling, if we pull out, the war will probably wrap up within two or three months. Tops. Because the Saudi government can't even fly its bombers all the way to Yemen to actually drop the bombs. They can't make it all the way to the capital city. They can't make it

through most of the country without their planes being refueled. So as soon as the US stops, they also don't have the satellite imagery, and it's harder for them to figure out the targeting. And they'll soon run out of bombs and ammunition too. So if the US stops helping them, it will end pretty quickly.

I was looking on the news today and this stuff happens really quickly. Over the weekend the Trump Administration has basically leaked out that they are thinking about stopping the refueling of the planes before this bill even gets voted on, which I think it's incredible. Who knows if it will actually happen or not, but the fact that Trump has decided, or the General Mattis has decided that maybe we need to stop refueling these planes . . . This bill hasn't even been voted on, but they're already starting to change their tune on what needs to happen. That's incredible. And I know why he's doing this. He wants to take the wind out of the sails for enough people who will say "the President is doing something about it so I don't need the vote on this bill anymore." You know take it again out of the hands of Congress. That it's the president's decision. This bill will still get voted on. We need to make sure that everyone who agrees that we need to end the war votes yes, and not just leave it to the whims of the Trump Administration, but make it congressional law so you can't back around, turn around, change things. And so he is forced into some sort of showdown with Congress. That's what I want to see happen and I think we are going to see it soon.

Audience member: Well the issue for the military strategists and for the corporate sponsors who [unintelligible] closely with them has really less to do with Yemen (I mean it would be a tremendous humanitarian thing, if we can end that), but their issue is whether the weapons will be supplied. And it's not just whether they are supplied to Saudis for this mission, but whether they will be supplied generally. So I wanted to ask what keeps us from, or is there anything we can do to prevent the administration from creating that kind of an incident whether in Iran or wherever? [Unintelligible] ... get Democrats and Republicans behind them and initiating another war.

Eric See: That's a good question. If I had that answer would be a lot further along than where we are at. But you are right. For the arms industry it's really about profits. They don't care if the bombs are used or not, they just want to sell them the bombs. Now if the bombs are used, then they have to buy more of them. So there is a certain benefit to that. Yes, they are really worried that all this new spotlight on Saudi Arabia and its behavior, and the war in Yemen, may really impact long term weapons sales to Saudi Arabia. And for them, the Raytheon's and Boeing's of this world, they don't care. If the war can wrap up and the weapons sales can keep going, they're all the more happy. Put it back under the table, back out of the limelight light, let the profits keep rolling in.

What we need to do ... you know you talked about Trump creating the path toward war with Iran—this is obviously something that people are very concerned about. One thing I'll say that is the march toward war is, although sometimes it is fast, but most times it's rather slow. There's a slow build-up; things need to get put into place. Ducks need to be lined up. Members of Congress and votes need to be lined up. Military troops need to be moved. A lot of stuff has to happen for the U.S. to go to war. And there are a lot of steps along the way where peace activists can work to be roadblocks to this—obstacles. Both in terms of promoting diplomacy, but also with stopping the military from moving forward with potential moves towards war. And there's not a united Administration now around going to war. There are a lot of people in Congress and the military, and even the Trump Administration, who are really reticent about going to war with Iran. They know that it would not be pretty. Mostly it's people in the military

who are the most reticent about going to war versus the Trumps who are fine with going to war because they are not going to get hurt or serve. They haven't seen the end of war. But yes, our defense secretary Mattis is worried about an actual war with Iran. He doesn't think it would be beneficial to the U.S. Even in his thinking, he thinks it would be very dangerous to play with, which is why he may be out soon.

Audience member: But didn't ... even since the Spanish-American War, and for every crisis we've been in, Trump was trying to point out that every time we were in a kind of economic slump, that all we needed to do is have a war—a trumped up war (wow, that's a good word) [laughter] Spanish American War and then World War I even, and then the depression and then Libya, Panama, South America, Nicaragua -- name it -- all these little conflicts we've gotten in benefited us economically. And Trump has more than pointed that out over and over again, and that's where he's brought a lot of people to his tribe. Anything that gets us money, anything that gets us out of an anti-economic slump is a war.

Eric See: Right. It's still dangerous. We live in dangerous times.

Audience member: They make a lot of money with war.

Toward Peace in the Korean Peninsula

Eric See: Yes. Which is why one of the things the Trump Administration is very concerned about is, there is a real fear in the Trump Administration right now that peace may break out in the Korean Peninsula. This keeps them up at night. It keeps some of the military up at night, and it keeps the arms industry up at night, because, we talked about Saudi Arabia receiving a lot of weapons from the U.S., well you know another big receiver of U.S. weapons is South Korea. I'm sure everyone remembers Trump and Kim Jong Un shaking hands, sending letters back and forth, being very chummy with each other. But people also remember Trump using, talking about fire and fury, about annihilating all 25 million North Koreans. And that was a mere 6 months ago. So this strange relationship he has with North Korea is interesting. And you see how whimsical it is for him—how he can shift on a dime. He talks about wanting to be the big deal maker. But the Trump Administration hasn't done anything real on the ground around diplomacy with North Korea. They had the big hand shake and that was pretty much it.

All the real diplomacy that's happening right now is because of the South Korean government and the North Korean government working together, and almost all of that started up because of grassroots peace activists in South Korea and in North Korea. Folks remember that South Korean president was swept into office on a platform of unification after millions and millions of people were demonstrating in South Korea. Candle light vigils stretching out for miles and miles. Some of the largest demonstrations in Korean history happening about people demanding and asking for peace, and Moon gets into office and that's one of the things he is working on. And this grassroots peace mobilization is activated. People have seen the results of their work, and they're not stopping. And that fever—that feeling of peace and that you can accomplish something is sweeping across the border. And with one of our advisory board members working to walk, the Women Cross DMZ organization, which is a new organization of South Korean women who are crossing over the DMZ into North Korea, and talking with North Korean folks about their lives. This is unprecedented.

Then you have the Olympic team. I'm sure people watched the Olympics, the North Korean and South Korean teams coming to the Olympics with the one flag of a united Korean Peninsula and the standing ovation that they got. And this isn't just at the Olympics. This has been at every

single international sports tournament where the two Koreans are coming together as joint teams. And coming out of it was a truce, an Olympic truce where North Korea said it wouldn't test any nuclear weapons or do any missile tests and South Korea said it wouldn't do any military exercises throughout the entire Olympics. And they kept that truce for a long time. And the U.S. was going to test its own missiles during the Olympics, but then they finally backed down after South Korea pleaded with them not to.

So that's where the real peacemaking has been. And it didn't stop there. They're having talks; they're exchanging information. And along the border now, along the military zone, the most heavily landmined place on our entire planet, there are teams of North Koreans and South Korean soldiers that are pulling the landmines out right now. They've just declared a no-fly zone where no military planes can fly within 10 miles of the DMZ. All the anti-aircraft guns that are permanently built on to the North Korean side and the South Korean side--to shoot at the planes . . . I mean these are these giant cannons that are dug into the sides of mountains, so they're not really movable. Well a lot of those, they are now they're covering the barrels of them. So they can't be used all along the border—both sides. They're starting to share intelligence, and they want to create, they're not sure but they want to create a place where citizens can go back and forth and cross the border.

This is happening right now. The South Koreans in the North Koreans are negotiating this. Where is the U.S. in all of this? So the biggest thing Trump can do right now, and the U.S. can do right now, is pretty much stay away from this process. But Trump is really worried. The Trump Administration has just told the South Korea that they are deeply disappointed in the no-fly zone over the border, and the U.S. is still contemplating whether they will agree to that no fly zone or not. Or whether we will still fly U.S. planes over.

So there's a lot of negotiation right now between the South Korean government and the U.S. And this is the state of play that all the use of new members of Congress need to know about when they come in and take office in January: What is the deal with Korean diplomacy? Is it really about . . . When Trump says he's going to be the big diplomat should we be worried? Should we support him? Do we support the South Koreans? What should a young, fresh-faced member of Congress do? So this is our real opportunity to teach and show these new politicians.

U.S. Weapons Sales and the Economy

Audience member: There's a graphic from the American Friends Service Committee on the back table, it's just one, showing U.S. military spending and the next five countries in the world, where they are, and we're still . . . our total is above the total of the next 10 [countries] and I think that kind of thing with some of what you send to Congress. I think something like that is very "ah!" and important.

Eric See: Absolutely. Yeah, I think you know... remember that Congress controls the purse strings, and if there's the Senate controlled by the Republicans and the House is controlled by the Democrats, that means they're going to have to negotiate this budget. And this is not just about Trump wanting money for his wall, but it's about the military spending spree that's been happening over the last 2 years. I mean it is Christmas every day for the arms industry right now. Weapons sales have gone up 30% since Trump got into office.

Audience member: It was terrible before

Eric See: It was terrible before, but it went up 30% since Trump got into office. That is the one thing he's really made big again is arms sales. Part of the reason why he opposed . . . was talking about opposing NATO was that he felt like the NATO countries needed to buy more U.S. weapons. They're not buying their fair share of our weapons. And this is just not good. It wasn't about Trump thinking that NATO was obsolete organization or that we should really sue for peace and get rid of these military organizations. No! It was to increase weapons sales. That is his idea of making deals, is forcing and bullying other countries to buy more U.S. weapons.

Audience member: What about oil and coal?

Eric See: Still big there. Weapons sales are some of our biggest. It's one of the top three exports we have are weapons along with oil, entertainment and some other things. I'm sure I'm running out of time.

Audience member: No, no. I was going to say that I've been told we are the biggest arms merchants in the world.

Eric See: We are.

Audience member: We lead every other country. We sell more arms. That's what we make. That's our military economy.

Eric See: Yes, our economy is really based on two things. It's based on the military economy and Wall Street. Those are the two things we really have that really keep money flowing through this country and there's a lot of people that want to keep that going.

Audience member: Are you going to say anything about China?

Eric See: China is pretty far down in terms of weapons sales.

Audience member: I mean not in weapons sales, but in our relationship with China.

Eric See: It's a pretty dynamic system right now. China is the number two economy on the planet, the U.S. being still number one. That may change in the next 10 years. There's a lot of issues around trade with China. China is also starting to build a bigger military, but it's still rather small. So a lot of the conflict with China has been around ports of trade in the South China Sea with both China building new islands and the U.S. trying to build new islands as well. And you can build an island if you just dump enough trash, and you create a mountain of soil and trash and create a new island and plant a flag on it. And this is now like U.S. territory and look it's 10 miles from your shore. So there's this island building weird issue going on with China right now.

China is obviously very interested in seeing diplomacy on the Korean Peninsula. What they're very worried about is North Korea collapsing as a country because where will the 25 million North Koreans go if there's any economic collapse in the Korean peninsula? They will probably go into China, and the Chinese are not really able to absorb that many refugees that quickly. So they would rather have a stable Korean Peninsula.

Japan is kind of worried about the unification too because that would mean a stronger Korea which would make for a weaker Japan.

Audience member: I wanted to raise two longer-term issues. Most of what Peace Action has been doing, and I followed it since I was an originator of the original Sane group [the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Polic]. Much of it has been dedicated to influencing legislative action, and I'm interested in the issue of what the limits of that are. What other things could be helped? I'm interested in the possibility that weapons redirection might be tied to the youth movement that's been going and the anti-gun legislation. I'm interested in the possibility, I know it's not immediately feasible because it's classified as a security issue, but the issue of an audit of the Defense Department. What could be done to get that [going]? And then the final one is that power is real and ominous. And the question again, just as it is for the bankers, is what do they do when they convert? But we know we can say in an abstract sense if you put you make more jobs if you put the money into health or into education. But abstractly that doesn't make a very big difference from the people that run Raytheon. So how can we address those areas of [unintelligible] that are not within the immediate legislative prescriptions for what we want to do?

From Anti-War to Peace and Planet

Eric See: You probably were looking at my notes before I got up here [laughter] either that or I gave you a little bit of money to keep the conversation going because that's kind of where I was going to go is: What is our connection and what should the peace movement be doing? What is our agenda right now? So first off I'll say that we should definitely think of ourselves as a peace movement in the current period and not an anti-war movement. And you could say "Eric you're just being semantic." But for most people in this country, they don't think that we're at war right now. I bet if you walked down to Lake Merritt and randomly shook someone and said "are we . . . is the U.S. at war? They'd say "no, we were." And then I say "well, wait a minute, I can't remember." It's so distant and removed. How long have we been at war? How long have we had soldiers stationed in Afghanistan now?

Audience: 18, 16

Eric See: A long time, right?

Audience: 17 years.

Eric See: Since 2001. So for a lot of young people that make up this new, burgeoning resistance, they've pretty much always been around, and conscious, and politically active since the U.S. has been at war. They haven't known a time when the U.S. hasn't been at war in the Middle East, in Afghanistan. You know some of them are serving, they're going to be able to serve and join the military and go over to Afghanistan, which had been going on since before they were born. That's how long this war has been going on. And the other wars are you know fought by drones, by Special Forces, by small groups of U.S. military elite. It is not the random person on the street who may end up fighting in the war. These are in a lot of ways forgotten wars. And for most people, they think we aren't at war. This is not what is calling young people out onto the streets right now, is stopping the war. So I think we need to look back further and see ourselves not as an anti-war movement but as a peace movement. And I think this helps us in a lot of ways.

First, by saying we're a peace movement, we can make ourselves, our issues broader. Peace is a good way to look at the complexities of the world. You know when you ask that mythical person on the street that I said you were going to shake down and ask if we are at war, you could also ask them "can you explain what's going on in Syria Right now?" You could ask me that question, and I'd have a hard time explaining it to you. It's very complicated. And some

people feel like are we supporting these people or these people? Who are we supposed to side with? And these wars where there's multiple countries involved and multiple different battles.

Well I don't think we should be thinking about whose side were on in terms of a country. I think we need to see ourselves as the peace movement, and frame ourselves in the form of human rights--that we're on the side of people, and that we're on the side of stopping slaughter and war and chaos and disorder around the planet. And that's a way to frame ourselves--as a Peace movement.

It's also a way to look at what are people really mobilizing around, and right now, you are right, it is with these school walkouts around assault weapons on the streets. Some of the biggest school walkouts out of high school that we've seen in the last 40 years are happening right now about assault weapons. That is a peace issue. We also need to connect up the issues of (and we've done this in the past) and you all know this... We need to connect up the issues of climate chaos that's happening. Because one thing that's definitely going to lead to more conflict over the next 40, 50, 100 years are resource wars.

You know some people in highly-paid think tanks that earn a lot of money and sit around and think and contemplate--and also do a lot of research--think that the first nuclear exchange that may happen on this planet, since our use of nuclear weapons, may be between India and Pakistan over water rights on the Ganges, because that's where things are going when it's about fighting over water. You know water is fairly basic you can't last very long without water, right?

And having nuclear weapons to fight over water maybe where our planet is heading. And so I think for the peace movement linking up with the growing sense that we need to take control of our planet again and wrest it from the hands of these corporations and governments that are killing us all. This is something that I think needs to happen. And we've done it before. We did it during Chernobyl, during Three Mile Island, with the anti-nuclear movement really connected up effectively with the environmental movement. And we can do that again. If we talk about refugees, people are talking about the Caravan, the Honduran Caravan that's coming up. You know the "Oh my God the Caravan that may arrive in 6 months" people walking barefoot slowly across Mexico that we need to send troops down to the border for. As an aside, has anyone heard about the Caravan after the election? Hmm, it seems to have dropped off the radar screen as soon as the election happened. So this Caravan of several thousand, 3,000 people marching and how this is unprecedented and everyone is freaking out. Well think about . . .

Audience member: Trump is freaking out

Eric See: Trump is freaking out but he is using it as kind of red meat for the base and stirring up people's fears of this kind of invasion. And we all know, of course, that what caused it is, what caused the chaos in Honduras, is our support for the coup down there. Now imagine you have a climate collapse and Mexico becomes unlivable. This is going to happen if we don't change course. Sometime in the next hundred years Mexico will be unlivable and then you'll have a hundred million people coming across the border to the U.S. which will be unlivable because we'll all be trying to get to the Canadian border.

[Laughter]

And what are the Canadians going to do 300 million Americans and 100 million Mexicans and Central Americans and South Americans? At a certain point this idea of refugees and climate refugees and mass migrations of people is going to become really intense.

And if we're still seeing each other as enemies, and we're still sitting on piles of weapons, and we still feel like we need to defend resources, things could get dangerous pretty quickly. So we have time to stop this, but I think framing it as a peace movement, framing it as a peace movement that's looking at peace not just among ourselves but peace and planet I think is the direction we need to go. I think the idea of a peace movement looks back to the triplets of evil that Martin Luther King Jr. talked about--of racism, militarism and extreme materialism—I think this is a good platform for us as well. This is the way to talk about the reshaping of our economy, and having the moral clarity of looking at our economy and who it serves and who it should serve. In other words I think this resistance movement to Trump needs to turn into a peace movement, a broad umbrella of a peace movement.

And also by calling it a peace movement make sure ensuring that we're looking internally, but we're also looking at what the U.S. is doing externally. We look at things from an international perspective and a local perspective at the same time. And we are all part of this movement and taking that message out there, and talking with folks about it--that the more we see ourselves as just an anti-war movement with a very limited agenda, I think that limits us in terms of our participation. But if we broaden our scope and sense of what peace really means, then I think there's a way to communicate with all these new organizations and new individuals who are becoming politicized and agitated. I mean they are an incredible amount of demonstration on the street these days. We need to be a part of that.

Question and Answers

Eric See: Does anybody have any last minute questions?

Audience member: So you see our role, we who are community out here, as advocates? Writing letter? Do you think that really has impact this particular stage of development where we are in the U.S. with legislators when you have an override with a President who will just ignore what we say and do what he wants to do? Where do you really see our bodies impacting and making a change? It's one thing convincing people and talking to legislators but how do we really make that difference to stop? Because you keep saying we can stop this or that. We have to put our bodies on the line?

Eric See: That's a tough question, but I'm glad you went to the heart of it. I think our biggest tactic for the want of a better word our biggest weapon to stop this is mass democratic action. And that takes a myriad of forms. And there is no one right way. Letters and phone calls to legislators have a profound effect. If we give up on our elected officials and just say that we've ceded this territory, it's no longer... a terrain that we can no longer really engaged with or struggle with, then we've given up a lot of territory. We need to be in the streets, if we're able to. Mass bodies in the street have a profound effect. Think of Tahrir Square in Egypt. It was people just being in the street day in and day out that was a profound impact because they couldn't write letters and make phone calls. We need to work on elections we need to elect people. We need to have as many tools in our tool basket as we can. But it really comes down to that phrase of mass democratic action. It's only by having hundreds and thousands of people doing it that it makes an impact and that's what we need. And that happens because of talking, and dialogue, and communication. So I hope that kind of answered your question.

Audience member: I'm trying to look for the connector.

Eric See: Yes. Thank you.

Audience member: I wanted to get back to Korea. What are you hearing about whether South Korea really wants to unify, a reunification with North Korea after the example of Germany? And the economic issues that arose there. I understand that South Korea really doesn't want unification.

Eric See: I think what the South Koreans have seen is that they need to take things slowly, or [for] the government if you just reunify all at once then there can be a lot of chaos. And so it's about figuring out how to reunify. But Moon is pretty convinced that we need to move in that direction. It's going to be a bumpy road. My prediction, however, is that I think events on the ground are going to happen faster than their plans. I think as soon as Koreans on both sides of the divide are effectively able to move back and forth across the border, they are going to reunify.

Audience member: Look at the economic issues that Germany faced.

Eric See: I know. But that's probably what's going to happen because the Korean people want to reunify. Families want to be reunified. They want to reconnect. As soon as you can have masses of people moving back and forth across the border, they are going to stay. They're going to move back and forth. They're going to reunite, they're going to celebrate, and it is never going to be the same world again.

Regardless of how slow or fast both the North Koreans and the South Koreans . . . You know there's a lot of power, and resources and prestige at stake around the reunification. I mean that is taking a war that's been going on for 50 years and People have built careers out of that and dismantling that takes a lot of hard work to do that. But I have a feeling things are going to move faster than they think.

Audience member: First I think that I really learned a lot. And I'm thinking a lot about the bigger picture and I thank you very good, important people. I'm thinking of immigration. You mentioned being pro-immigration. I think we need to recognize it's a very, very complicated and difficult issue. I don't think we can be just pro-immigration. We need to have a policy and a humanitarian view of how we do this. And what part of what's happened with Trump is he is so extreme that we are fighting against his extreme policy and not tackling the really tough stuff. And I think it's probably that way with other issues.

Eric See: I'm not an immigration expert. And like any issue, once you get down to really changing things you need people who have careers and who have spent a long time--many, many years of their life--thinking about good solutions to this. But when you are out on the street and you are saying something you can't say "we need a more comprehensive immigration policy." You have to boil it down to being pro-immigration. I think the sentiment is that we need to make sure that we're all brothers and sisters with each other. And that we really have one planet that we're living on right now. And people have moved, humanity has moved all over this planet over the last hundred thousand years to avoid climate issues, to learn new places to live. We are an adaptable, mobile species and we will continue to be. And people move for their own survival, for the benefit of their children, and find a place to live. We need policies that work around those things, the basic kind of sense of human survival.

Audience member: I have two comments, and the first one is the East Bay Peace Action, our last newsletter had an article about Yemen. So if you haven't seen it. I don't know if we have samples of it in the back . . . and the other thing, I just wanted to again reiterate what Eric said, that's it's about elections and critical mass of voting, and that's going to make a difference. It made a difference in the House elections--more and more people who registered to vote, who got to vote. I know people all around the Country who were giving people rides to go vote, who were really making sure that their voices were heard. And that's where we all at one level or another can encourage people that your vote counts.

Audience member: I wanted to leave you with two things. You mentioned that I had asked you questions about the agenda you had and I have something that I wrote up for the local peace [?] office here and I'll leave them out here for people to look at.

The other thing that I wanted to ask is just a quick strategic question. It's never been easy to show the pie chart and to have people look at that and say "well, okay, but what can we do about that" and "we know that we are not getting enough medical care, we're not getting enough education. But we can't do anything about that."

But what I thought tactically. . . . We know we have the data on the P.R. firms and the defense department and the intelligence agencies. We know how they package that news for us. We people in news agency offices. And the budgets [Unintelligible] are immense. And I wonder just tactically if people may not be willing to oppose weapons because they will people, but they may be able to oppose a budget that makes them lied to. I just wonder about the possibilities of that tactically. And I also wanted to thank you for coming.

Eric See: You're welcome. I'll make one comment. The question of the military budget is a very difficult one. It is in a lot of way the hardest issue for us to push against. People do see that the military budget is this huge, gargantuan 8-million-ton gorilla in the house that sucks up everything else. But they don't know what to do about it. It's as inevitable as the sun shining. So you can have an opinion about the sun, or the rain, or the winter is coming . . . like "oh! I don't like winter!" but I'm going to figure out how to deal with winter . . . like curse the sky because it is getting cold. For people I think it becomes "I'm going to ignore it because I don't think I can change it." I think we need to come up with a different way to think about the military budget. I think the pie chart has been difficult. People see it and say "yes, I get it. Okay. It's bad. What can I do about it?"

I think the key thing is that members of Congress, they have been working at one point to put a brake on the military because they know for the military it's a bigger issue for the Republicans than social spending. So the balanced budget and the sequestration and putting caps on the military spending. We need to get back to that because once you create the idea that you can cut back the military and it is okay--even if it is 5 billion dollars, 1 billion dollars--you can cut it back and the world doesn't collapse. Once we start doing this repeatedly, chiseling away at it, and people say, "Okay, we can still survive."