

The social roots of the mass shooting in Orlando

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It took barely 48 hours for the initial official narrative about the massacre in Orlando, Florida—that it was an ISIS-directed attack on the US homeland—to unravel. Whatever role Omar Mateen’s sympathies for Islamic terrorism may have played in his decision to carry out a mass killing at the Pulse gay bar with a military-style assault rifle, it is now acknowledged by the government that there is no evidence that his actions were directed by ISIS or any similar organization.

Moreover, it has emerged that Mateen was largely driven by a combination of personal emotional and psychological demons, including a conflicted sexual identity, and backward, reactionary and racist views that have much in common with home-grown right-wing and white supremacist groups.

These revelations have not prevented the president of the United States, the presumptive presidential nominees of both major political parties and the corporate-controlled media from continuing to exploit the deaths of 49 victims, the injuries, some life-threatening, of another 53, and the grieving of thousands of family members and friends to push a preexisting agenda of war abroad and repression within the US.

Without seriously attempting to align their prescriptions with the facts that have thus far emerged about the killer and his crime, they continue to seize on this latest in an endless series of mass shootings in America to push the so-called “war on terror,” which has played such a sinister role in creating the social environment that breeds these types of horrific events.

It is now known that Mateen’s evident homophobia coexisted with frequent visits to the Pulse bar and an active presence on social media used by homosexuals. Former coworkers have come forward to describe the killer’s far-right and racist views. Daniel Gilroy, who worked alongside Mateen between March 2014 and March 2015, can be seen in an interview posted on the *New York Times* web site describing his encounter with

the future mass murderer.

Gilroy stated that he was “not surprised” when he heard that Mateen had carried out the Orlando massacre. “He was very racist, very sexist, anti-Jew, anti-homosexual and he made it known by derogatory statements as much as he could.” Gilroy has added that Mateen often talked about killing blacks. When his employer failed to heed his complaints about Mateen, Gilroy quit the firm.

The homicidal eruption of Omar Mateen, while the worst mass shooting in modern American history, is anything but an aberration. Thus far in June, according to the Gun Violence Archive web site, there have been 18 mass shootings in the US. Gunshot homicides totaled 8,124 in 2014, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Gun homicides in America kill about as many people as car crashes. They occur at an almost exponentially greater rate than in all other advanced industrialized countries. In the US, the death rate from gun homicides is about 31 per million people per year. In Germany, the figure is two per million; in England, only one. In Japan, the likelihood of dying from a gunshot is roughly the same as an American’s chance of being killed by lightning—one in 10 million.

The question that is imperiously raised by such facts is: What is it about American society that so frequently leads mentally unstable individuals to resort to mass murder, often combined with suicide? This is a question that the political and media establishment does not care to—or dare to—address. The reason is that it leads rapidly to an exposure of the malignant state of American capitalist society.

Instead, what is offered is a cynical and dishonest rehash of past cover-ups for the system that generates such levels of social dysfunction and violence. The official response to each new incident of mass killing is a stereotypical combination of war mongering and demands for further surveillance on the population and other

police-state measures. From the Democrats, the recipe also includes demands for gun control, as though the prevalence of guns is the cause, rather than a symptom, of the disease.

From the Republicans, and especially their current likely presidential candidate, the fascistic billionaire Donald Trump, the response features new and even more savage attacks on immigrants in general, and Muslims in particular.

This was fully on display Tuesday when President Obama gave a speech following a meeting of his National Security Council. Flanked by his secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the head of the Homeland Security Department, the director of national intelligence and other security officials, Obama declared the central priority arising from the Orlando massacre to be the intensification of the war to “destroy” ISIS.

He touted his recent actions escalating US military violence in both Iraq and Syria, including the deployment of additional Special Forces troops and additional assets such as attack helicopters. He boasted of having “taken out” more than 120 top ISIS leaders, and alluded to plans to escalate the US military intervention in Libya.

He then moved to demands that Congress, meaning the Republicans, pass legislation restricting gun ownership, and concluded with a denunciation of Trump for calling for a ban on Muslim immigration and other discriminatory measures against immigrants, primarily from the standpoint of the exigencies of the “war on terror” and US neocolonial operations in Muslim countries.

Of course, as always, nothing was said about the direct responsibility of his own policies and the wars of the past quarter-century in Central Asia and the Middle East for the rise of ISIS, both in the sense of its roots in the catastrophe unleashed by US mass killing and destruction and Washington’s deliberate stoking of sectarian conflict, and in the more immediate sense of CIA backing for ISIS and its forebears and their arming and financing by Washington’s despotic regional allies.

All of this is an attempt to conceal the real causes of mass violence in America, which lie in the decay and malignant crisis of American capitalism. Obama presides over the latest chapter in 25 years of unceasing war abroad, beginning with the first Persian Gulf War in 1991, and relentless attacks on the social conditions and democratic rights of the working class at home, carried out alike by Democratic and Republican administrations.

Never-ending war has been accompanied by the

militarization of social life and politics within the US. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the impact of this daily reality within the borders of the United States, especially on the most unstable social elements. Political reaction, national chauvinism, anti-immigrant racism—the most backward sentiments have been systematically cultivated in order to pursue an agenda of imperialist war and the impoverishment of the working class.

To prepare for the inevitable growth of social resistance, the police have been turned into a militarized occupation force in working-class communities, using terror, brutality and outright murder.

The betrayal and collapse of the unions, their alliance with the ruling elite against the workers and suppression of class struggle, have added to the social malaise.

Now, however, we are seeing both in the US and internationally the beginnings of a new upsurge of class struggle, driven by immense anger over the colossal growth of social inequality and the brazen criminality of the ruling elite. This prefigures the inevitable revival of social revolution.

For the American ruling class—all the more reason to seek to deflect internal social tensions outward by means of nationalism and war.

For the working class—there is only one answer to the sickeningly routine eruption of homicidal violence in America, the path of socialist revolution to put an end to the diseased system that produces such horrors.

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