

The social and political roots of mass shootings in America

the International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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In the wake of the horrific massacre at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, hundreds of thousands of student youth have organized walkouts, protests and demonstrations against mass shootings in America.

The sentiments animating the demonstrations go far beyond the limited and state-sanctioned politics of the official protest organizers. Facing unprecedented inequality, the looming threat of nuclear war, and the rise of nationalism, xenophobia, and far-right movements, there is a growing recognition among young people that the pervasive violence seen in their schools is the product of something deeply diseased in American society.

Neither of the parties of the political establishment offer anything to address the underlying causes of violence in America. The Republican Party, the Trump administration and the National Rifle Association are calling for the arming of teachers, beefed up police forces and the further militarization of schools—with disastrous consequences.

The Democratic Party and its various satellite organizations are working to curtail the outrage over school violence and channel it behind the Democrats' electoral strategy. Their focus on gun control is an attempt to increase the powers of the state while obscuring the more fundamental questions bound up with gun violence.

And what are the issues raised by such horrific acts of violence such as mass shootings?

First, the prevailing violence in society cannot be understood without addressing the staggering levels of social inequality. Numerous scientific studies establish a correlation between inequality and social violence. In the United States, three billionaires own as much wealth as the bottom half of society, or 160 million

people. The crushing exploitation of workers, inherent in the capitalist system, has produced at one pole a ruling elite drunk with wealth, and at the other, mass social misery.

As the global economic position of the US over the last 40 years has declined, the ruling class has responded by starving social services, including mental health services, while draining workers' pensions, reducing wages, benefits and full-time jobs.

Most of those participating in the student demonstrations have known only deteriorating social conditions throughout their lives. A high school senior has lived through 18 years in which there have been 600,000 drug overdoses (200,000 involving opioids) and 650,000 suicides (130,000 by veterans), while an estimated 700,000 people have died prematurely during this period due to lack of health care.

The second fundamental issue bound up with the rampant homicidal violence in American society is the state-sanctioned killing carried out by the US military around the world. The “war on terror,” now in its 18th year, dominates not only the political life of the United States, but its social culture as well.

Threats of violence on a scale that far surpass any individual outburst like Parkland or Columbine can be heard daily in the American media, not by a disturbed teenager, but by the president of the United States. “North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States,” Trump has declared. “They will be met with fire, fury and, frankly, power, the likes of which this world has never seen before.”

Representatives of both big-business parties have proven, through the most brutal acts, their commitment to defending the interests of the American ruling class through violence. Democrat President Bill Clinton dropped bombs on Iraq and waged an air war against

Serbia that, combined, killed thousands of innocent people. George W. Bush, who came to power through the theft of an election, launched the longest war in US history in Afghanistan and a war in Iraq, based on lies about “weapons of mass destruction,” that has led to the death of more than 1 million people.

Obama, the candidate of “hope” and “change,” continued Bush’s wars, institutionalized drone assassinations and domestic spying and tore apart millions of families by deporting more immigrants than all previous presidents combined, all while handing out hundreds of billions of dollars to Wall Street.

The state of permanent war and mass surveillance has an effect on the social psychology of broader layers of the population. In the case of 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz, who was a member of the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), the influence was more direct.

Nearly 100 years ago, in the aftermath of World War I, the renowned attorney Clarence Darrow, in arguing against the death penalty for two young men, Leopold and Loeb, who had carried out a brutal murder, pointed to the social origins of individual violence. Referring to the impact of World War I, he argued, “The tales of death were in their homes, their playgrounds, their schools; they were in the newspapers that they read; it was a part of the common frenzy—what was a life? It was nothing. It was the least sacred thing in existence and these boys were trained to this cruelty.”

For today’s youth it is the tales of the last 25 years of unending war waged in every corner of the globe that floods their homes, their playgrounds, and their schools. It is the images of gruesome police murders and armed agents of the state abducting immigrants that are the examples offered by today’s ruling class.

The root cause of the unending string of mass violence in America lies in the capitalist system and the nightmarish world that it has created.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) warns that protests addressed to the Democratic and Republican parties will fall on deaf ears. It is to the working class, the great progressive and revolutionary social force, that students must turn.

The solution to the dead end of the capitalist system can be seen in the resurgence of class struggle in the United States and around the world. The recent strike by teachers and school employees in West Virginia has inspired students and all workers to take up a fight

against inequality and exploitation. This year has seen protests and mass demonstrations of workers in the UK, Germany, France, Greece, Kenya, Argentina, Iran, Sri Lanka and many other countries.

The coming upheavals will transform the social and political culture of the entire globe. A new pole of attraction will galvanize workers everywhere in a common fight for social equality, an end to war, and for the transformation of society to meet social need, not private profit.

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