

“This can be turned around by people who want to build a new society”

California: Protesters denounce war and social inequality

By our reporters
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The WSWS is posting a series of reports this week from the March 24 demonstrations against school violence. This report is from demonstrations that took place in California.

Tens of thousands of students and young people took part in more than 70 March for Our Lives demonstrations in California on Saturday.

More than 55,000 people attended in the protest in Los Angeles, America’s second largest city, according to official tallies. One hundred and twenty miles to the south, around 10,000 people marched in San Diego. Thousands more demonstrated in the northern cities of San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland.

The mobilizations behind the protests were broad. Demonstrations took place in every major city and in many small towns as well. Weed, California, population 2,967, hosted an event in a local park. Demonstrations also took place in Weaverville (population 3,600), Truckee (13,864) and Tehachapi (12,495).

The large turnout in the most populous US state reflects a political shift, as a new generation of millions of young people are being thrust into politics for the first time. The demonstrators were motivated by opposition to war, poverty, inequality, police violence, and other malignant features of American social life.

Students at the rally, many born after the 9/11 terror attacks and the beginning of the “War on Terror,” responded particularly strongly when campaigners for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality—the youth wing of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP)—explained the connection between mass shootings in the United States and the endless glorification of militarism and war.

Los Angeles

Wide layers of high school and college students attended the rally in Los Angeles. In addition, there was a large presence of older people, many of whom participated in the antiwar marches from the 60s and 70s. The crowd was extremely diverse, reflecting the population of the city itself, with white, black, Latino, and Asian demonstrators participating.

CJ attended the Los Angeles march with his family. “Kids shouldn’t be worrying about guns. It’s a shame that we have to do this.” When asked about war, he said “I think that’s part of it. We’re constantly talking about war, about going to war. We cover war. It’s in video games. It’s prevalent... When the government’s saying we need to go to war, we need to do this, we need to do that, it trickles down.”

Kelly Miranda also attended the march. “Our kids have to go to school in fear. Just the other day, my sister’s school was on lockdown for LAUSD. Every single parent was freaking out because they thought that there was a shooter in the school. Parents were crying, parents were upset, we feared for the kids inside. It wasn’t anything big, but that was the first thing that came to our mind. It’s really upsetting.”

“Schools should be safe. You shouldn’t be at work thinking about what’s going on with my kids, wondering if they’ve been shot. Depression and anxiety rates have gone up and it’s really affecting everybody. It’s partly a mental health issue to that we should recognize. We should be funding that. It should be free.”

Celeste Banetten spoke to IYSSE campaigners at the march. “The NRA has too much control. Our government representatives no longer represent the people. And that’s not just the case with the NRA.”

Celeste pointed to feelings of alienation and social estrangement among young people as a factor behind mass shootings. “These shootings happen because students are becoming ‘radicalized’ as well. What they say about terrorists, that they’re becoming ‘radicalized’ online because they don’t feel like anyone understands them—the Islamic terrorists—we’re doing the same thing to everybody.”

Northern California

In the Bay Area, IYSSE members took part in the demonstrations in San Jose and Oakland.

“There’s [the possibility of] war with Iran, there’s more problems at home than war abroad,” two high school students who attended the San Jose demonstration told the IYSSE.

“Gun violence is a symptom of the rest of things that are happening in society, [including] tremendous inequality,” another demonstrator in San Jose said.

Nate, who attended the demonstration in Oakland, drew the connection between mass shootings and American imperialism. “We’ve got the United States which is the biggest arms dealer in the world, and making profits from it and dominating the planet ... and this can be turned around by people who want to build a new society. It will only come about with this kind of action, with masses of students and workers in the streets, demanding change because the politicians are all bought and paid for by the rich.”

“I grew up during the Vietnam War and there’s been wars ever since then,” Nate continued. “[America’s] entire economy is predominantly built on war. The economics of capitalism and imperialism is what it is. Profit making is what drives everything, so we need a new system where profit is no longer a consideration ... I hope this movement continues and draws in much more of the working class. Once the workers come out and start striking and demonstrating, then there’s huge power.”

“What our president is trying to do right now, which seems to be to pick wars with other countries, is really disturbing,” Chris told the IYSSE in Oakland. “I think that it’s time that the working class come together and build a movement. There is plenty of money in this country ... if it is done fairly, and right now, it’s all set up to help the rich.”

David Moore, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US Senate in California, spoke to a crowd of students at the rally. “Don’t appeal to the Democrats, because they’re in the pockets of the banks,” Moore warned

students. Instead, Moore called on students to “[turn] to the working class. Teachers in West Virginia went on strike and defied their union, they defied the Democratic Party, and the whole point of it is our fight is an international fight. You and I have more in common with workers in Mexico, China and Europe, than we do with Bill Gates, Donald Trump, or Barack Obama.”

“Down with the billionaires, up with the working class! We need to organize and unite.” Moore ended with an appeal for young people to join the IYSSE and SEP and support the party’s campaign in the June elections.

San Diego

Dahlia, Maddy, Tom and Nicole are all students at Del Norte High School in San Diego who helped organize a walkout at their school last Wednesday to protest gun violence. They were angered by the response of their school’s administration to the Parkland, Florida shooting, which was to add more security cameras. They said they want to “create a space for students to voice their opinions not just on gun violence, but climate change, mental health, and other social issues” at their school.

Kaylani is 11 years old and attended the march in San Diego with her mother. Kaylani expressed anxiety about life in her school after Parkland. “Now we have more cameras and police at my school. It’s scary,” Kaylani explained.

Nawal and Nasri are students in San Diego. “Everyone was talking about [the march]” after the Parkland shooting, they said. “Everyone wanted to join in the walkout and attend the march. We wrote letters to our administrators and our teachers supported us. We’re here asking ‘why hasn’t there been any change?’”

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