

“It’s been hell for the world”

US Army tweet provokes outpouring of antiwar sentiment

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The United States Army did not get the response it intended when it asked in a tweet last week, “How has serving impacted you?” Instead of paeans to the military, the horrific reality of war on a world scale broke through the annual celebration of American militarism over the Memorial Day weekend.

By Monday night, there were over 11,000 comments in response to the US Army’s question. The official lies and platitudes employed by the ruling elite and the media to exalt war were shattered by stories detailing the living hell that has been imposed on millions of lives.

So massive was the outpouring of sentiment on social media that the response was covered by the mainstream news Monday night, a singular rarity on a day usually devoted to mindless jingoism. The incident even made headlines around the world, an expression of the vast global impact of US militarism.

Veteran suicides, depression, violence, recurring nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder, drug abuse, addiction, alcoholism, rape and sexual assault by commanding officers, inadequate health care, generational trauma, exposure to chemical agents, war crimes. These were just some of the nightmarish tales that emerged.

Heartbreaking stories of veteran suicides were all too common. Shane Burley’s story was repeated in various forms by numerous people. “My best friend from high school was denied his mental health treatment and forced to return to a third tour in Iraq, despite having such deep trauma that he could barely function,” Shane wrote. “He took a handful of sleeping pills and shot himself in the head two weeks before deploying.”

Sean described what he called “the ‘Combat Cocktail’: PTSD, severe depression, anxiety. Isolation.

Suicide attempts. Never ending rage. It cost me my relationship with my eldest son and my grandson. It cost some of my men so much more. How did serving impact me? Ask my family.”

Lies used to manufacture public consent for war were also opposed. “Don’t fabricate enemies and shove innocent Americans into wars that kill innocent civilians,” wrote one person. “You’ve gained nothing from all the wars combined. It’s been hell for the world.”

For all the nauseating glorification of the military by the media and the political establishment, those that serve in the military as cannon fodder are generally economic conscripts looking for a way out of poverty and at the chance of a college degree. The reality is they end up maimed, broken and scarred, with generations of families and friends affected by the trauma.

More than 5,500 veterans killed themselves last year, and active-duty military suicides were at an all-time high in 2018. More than 321 of those in active duty in the military killed themselves in 2018, with 138 in the US Army alone.

A 2018 study by the Council on Foreign Relations found that recruits from families with annual incomes less than \$38,400 a year made up 19 percent of soldiers. Over 60 percent of recruits come from families with annual incomes less than \$61,403, and over 80 percent come from families who make less than \$80,912. The study did not show the levels in which the top 5 percent or the top 1 percent participated in the wars, but they no doubt constitute a tiny minority.

Numerous commenters on the US Army Twitter thread referred to the statements of Major-General

Smedley Butler, who famously confessed in 1933, “War is just a racket. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.”

There is deep opposition to war in the working class in the United States and internationally. As with every other political issue, however, the real interests of the vast majority of the population are excluded from official political life.

In the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, this sentiment found expression in mass demonstrations of millions of people throughout the world. Opposition to the Iraq war was channeled behind the Democratic Party, culminating in the election of Barack Obama in 2008. Extending the Bush administration’s “war on terror” in Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama attacked more than seven countries, including Libya and Syria, and killed thousands of innocent civilians through drone warfare.

The Trump administration now plans to dispatch 1,500 new troops to the Middle East and has threatened to “end” Iran. His administration also announced the doctrine of “great power” conflict, preparing even bigger military conflagrations against Russia and China that hurtle the world towards a third world war.

In 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs under the Trump administration proposed to close more than 1,100 facilities in an effort to privatize health care. While only \$220 billion was allotted to Veterans Affairs for the 2020 budget, more than \$718 billion was requested by the Pentagon, a five percent increase over the previous year. If the trend continues, more than \$7 trillion will be spent on war over the next decade.

With the support of the Democratic Party, moreover, the Trump administration is intensifying its campaign against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for exposing the crimes of American imperialism.

The Democrats have waged their opposition to Trump largely on the demand that the administration adopt a more aggressive position against Russia and expand the war in Syria and the Middle East. The Democrats have sought to position themselves as the party of the military and the intelligence agencies, hailing as heroes such arch warmongers as the late Republican Senator John McCain.

And the organizations of the complacent and

privileged upper middle class that surround the Democratic Party have become the most adamant supporters of American imperialism.

The sentiments expressed in the response the US Army tweet must and will find more organized form. The mass opposition to war must be connected to the growing struggles of workers, in the United States and internationally, against inequality and exploitation. The growing support for socialism must be connected to a conscious political movement of the international working class against capitalism and imperialism.

George Marlowe

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