

Mass shooting in Montreal

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A 25-year-old man went on a shooting spree at Montreal's Dawson College Wednesday, targeting students and college personnel at random and leaving panic and death in his wake.

Authorities have yet to determine whether the gunman, who has been identified as Kimveer Gill, ultimately died from police bullets or a self-inflicted wound. But before succumbing, he fired off scores, if not hundreds of bullets, killing an 18-year-old girl, Anastasia DeSousa, and wounding some twenty others, including six critically.

According to eyewitnesses, shortly after 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, Gill arrived at one of Dawson's entrances clad entirely in black and carrying a rifle and a large shoulder-bag. He briefly mingled with students who were milling about the patio-style entrance, then raised his rifle and opened fire. As students fled in panic, Gill went into the college and moments later made a shooting entrance into a large atrium where many students had gathered to eat lunch and chat.

Police exchanged gunfire with Gill soon after. But another 10, possibly 15 minutes, passed before he was felled or committed suicide. In the interim, he fired volley after volley from as many as three different guns at the police who had positioned themselves in a corridor giving access to the atrium's south-entrance. Meanwhile, those students who couldn't flee because they were caught in the gunfire sought refuge behind tables and by cowering on the atrium floor.

Undoubtedly the casualties would have been higher—possibly much higher—if police officers had not been near the Dawson entrance on other business when the shooting began. These officers, whom Gill reportedly saw but ignored, immediately apprised police headquarters of the shooting, then followed the gunman into the building.

The shooting, panicked flight and eventual police-organized evacuation of thousands of students and college personnel, and the subsequent intensive police search of the college grounds and surrounding area for possible accomplices seriously disrupted life in Canada's second

largest city. Parents and siblings of Dawson students, understandably desperate for news of their loved ones, descended on the campus further adding to the confusion and chaos.

Police say that they have found no evidence that Wednesday's shootings was motivated by racism or any political grievance, however deranged, unlike the 1989 Montreal Polytechnique massacre, in which a young man who blamed feminism for his failure to gain admission to engineering school killed 14 female students.

Also, there appears to be no immediate explanation for why Gill targeted Dawson. He was not, and reputedly had never been, a Dawson student.

A Canadian-born son of an Indian immigrant family, Gill was reportedly infatuated with guns and with violent video-games and movies, including *Rambo*, *Natural Born Killers*, and a video-game based on the 1999 Columbine High School massacre. Although he lived with his mother in a Montreal suburb, his web-blog and a questionnaire he filled out on a Gothic/Heavy Metal website indicated that he was estranged from his parents and felt rage and disgust at the world. The vast majority of people he had ever met, wrote Gill, were "worthless, no good, knifing, betraying lieing (sic), deceptive."

His blog, which has now been taken down, also reportedly suggested he had been the target of bullying in his adolescence and that school authorities and his peers failed to come to his aid.

In coming days we will undoubtedly learn more about Gill's life and psychological make-up, but some points do need to be made about the initial media and political reaction.

Unquestionably there is a public thirst for information when a mass-shooting or other tragedy takes place in the heart of a city that is home to millions. But the blanket "live" coverage offered by Canadian television stations and by CNN and various other US news channels was more spectacle than source of information.

While Wednesday afternoon's reporting was sensationalist and oftentimes confusing due to the

recycling of rumors, Thursday's more ponderous press reportage and commentary contained a clear message: Wednesday's tragedy was a lightening bolt in a clear blue sky; it was a crime committed for unfathomable reasons by a single warped individual, and was without any social roots or significance.

An editorial in the *National Post* affirmed, "To the extent" shootings like those at Columbine and Dawson College "follow a pattern, it is not one that can be traced to any particular social or technological phenomenon. ..."

"Instead of hunting for external phenomena on which to blame this tragedy, Canadians should focus their attention on the real 'root cause' of school shootings: evil, troubled souls."

Not to be outdone, English Canada's newspaper of record, the *Globe and Mail*, published three columns that all reprised the theme that Wednesday's events were inexplicable and not in anyway related to the social environment.

As the headline for his column, Roy MacGregor used a remark made by the father of the sole fatality victim of a 1999 school shooting in Taber, Alberta: "If you can make sense of this, let me know." Christie Blatchford, for her part, proclaimed the phenomenon of school shootings akin to a freak of nature and just as unpredictable and unmanageable. John Ibbetson made the obvious point that mass-killers are alienated from society. But he declared it pointless to try to answer the question as to why people could become so alienated and so angry as to run amuck, doing horrific violence to other and themselves. It's "just evil in our midst," said Ibbetson. "... No society has found a way to prevent, or even identify, minds warped to the point where they become a lethal menace."

Yet shooting-sprees, let alone mass shootings at schools and colleges, have not always been regular occurrences.

What causes a given individual to seek vindication and validation through such a vile form of action as mass killing is undoubtedly the product of a unique combination of personal despair and extreme disorientation, but a combination that emerges in and is reinforced by a very definite social environment.

In Canada, as in all the advanced capitalist countries, recent decades have seen an enormous coarsening of social life as the most privileged sections of society have pursued an agenda aimed at defending and enhancing their social position through the systematic dismantling of jobs, working conditions, and social and public services and the subordination of all aspects of social life ever-more directly to the exigencies of the capitalist market.

Inseparable from this assault on the social position of working class has been the exaltation of individual pursuit of wealth and celebrity, as well as the marginalization and denigration of the victims of capitalist restructuring.

This has gone side by side with the promotion of militarism, especially since the Bush administration seized on the events of September 11, 2001 to implement a massive rearmament program and launch predatory wars of conquest against Iraq and Afghanistan.

With the corporate media acting as a chorus, Bush and his cronies have repeatedly celebrated the wanton destruction wrought by US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan as "taking out the enemy", while routinely issuing threats of war against other powers. Whereas once Washington made a pretense of supporting a system of international law, it now unabashedly proclaims might is right.

As for Stephen Harper's Conservatives, they have made the Canadian Armed Forces' participation in the NATO counter-insurgency operation in southern Afghanistan their government's defining initiative. Their aim is to use the Afghan intervention to put paid to any notion of the CAF as a peacekeeper, rather than a warrior-force for promoting the interests of the Canadian elite on the world stage. In making this shift, as the extensive favorable coverage in the corporate media indicates, the Conservatives have strong support from corporate Canada.

While Gill considered himself an outsider, the images on his blog of him striking various warrior poses bear the imprint of movies like Rambo and of a political environment increasingly infected with militarism and social reaction.



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