

Three dead in San Bernardino, California school shooting

Ben McGrath
11 April 2017

A shooting at an elementary school in San Bernardino, California Monday left three people dead in an apparent murder-suicide. The police identified the shooter as Cedric Anderson, 53, who took his own life after killing his wife Karen Elaine Smith, also 53, in a classroom with fifteen students and two other adults.

Smith was a teacher at North Park Elementary School, working in a special needs classroom with students in first through fourth grade. Two children standing near Smith were also struck, but were apparently not specifically targeted by Anderson. Both were airlifted to hospital, 8-year-old Jonathon Martinez died from his injuries, the second boy, a 9-year-old, is reportedly in stable condition.

Anderson and Smith were married in January, but their relationship turned sour within the last month, according to media reports. However, no one that knew the couple suspected things would turn violent.

School staff knew Anderson, who checked in at their office shortly before 10:30 a.m. claiming he had come to drop something off for Smith. “Cedric entered the classroom and—from what we understand, without saying anything—armed with a large caliber revolver, opened fire on his wife,” said San Bernardino Police Chief Jarrod Burguan.

Approximately 530 students between kindergarten and sixth grade attend North Park Elementary, mostly from low-income Latino families. They were evacuated to the nearby Cajon High School where distraught parents came to pick up their children. North Park will be closed for two days, the school district stated.

School shootings and other mass killings are, sadly, frequent occurrences in America, where the military and destruction of other countries is glorified in the media. According to Everytown for Gun Safety, an organization that compiles statistics on gun violence,

there have been 220 school shootings since 2013, with 48 last year alone. On average, seven people under the age of nineteen are killed by guns every day.

Less than two years ago San Bernardino was the site of the attack by Syed Farook and his wife Tashfeed Malik in December 2015 that left 14 people dead.

In response to Monday’s killings, United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos issued the formulaic and empty platitudes that have become routine from government officials. “As a mother and grandmother, today’s senseless violence is a tragedy no parent should ever have to face. I ask everyone to join me in keeping all the victims and those impacted in your prayers.” As of this writing, President Donald Trump, a frequent user of Twitter, had not issued a statement.

However, nothing will be done to help prevent similar crimes in the future. If anything, the government will use this latest incident to justify further attacks on democratic rights, such as increased surveillance of the public and accelerating the militarization of police forces nationwide.

Least of all will the social conditions in San Bernardino or around the country which contribute to the country’s all too frequent mass killings and other outbursts of violence be addressed.

These types of tragic events have now become so common that many young people in the area have become numb when they occur. Patrick Kahler, a math teacher at San Geronimo High School told the *Los Angeles Times*, “It’s not, ‘Oh my gosh.’ It’s like students are now becoming jaded to it, which is really sad.”

Last May, a report based on statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) by criminal defense attorney Graham Donath found San Bernardino

to be the most dangerous city in California. It is no coincidence that San Bernardino is one of the many cities in the state facing financial trouble. After the city filed for bankruptcy in 2012 with \$45 million in debt, a court approved a restructuring plan in January. Social services have been slashed including to the fire department and garbage collection.

City fees, which do not require voter approval, are being increased, forcing the burden of the bankruptcy on the poverty stricken working class. Sewer collection and treatment fees, for example, have already begun rising in a city where the median household income is \$38,778, much lower than the national median income of \$53,482. The unemployment rate is eight percent, nearly double the national rate.

Under these types of economic stress and hardship, it is not surprising that some people snap. A study released in November 2014 by the US Bureau of Justice Statistics analyzing poverty and domestic violence between 2008 and 2012 found that persons in households at or below the official poverty line were victims of violent abuse at a rate more than double those living in high-income homes: 39.8 per 1,000 people compared to 16.9 per 1,000 respectively. These numbers cut across regional and racial lines with similar numbers for poor households in urban and rural areas as well as for poor white and black households.

Big business, however, has moved into such areas to exploit the desperate conditions workers face. San Bernardino, like other cities facing bankruptcy such as Stockton, is home to several Amazon fulfillment centers where employees face strict and demanding conditions for only \$12 or \$13 an hour, laboring for ten hours or more a day. Workers are constantly tracked and are not even allowed to use their phones while on the job.

Highlighting the extreme theft taking place is Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who at the beginning of 2016 was the fourth richest man in the United States, with a net worth of \$47 billion. By March of this year, Bezos had surpassed Warren Buffett as the second-richest person on the planet with \$75.6 billion.

The wealth produced by the working class is going into the pockets of multi-billionaires whose parasitic existences rely on the economic devastation of cities like San Bernardino where people are forced into ever lower paying jobs. Monday's attack is a further

indication of the devastating impact of declining social conditions in the United States, particularly in economically troubled cities like San Bernardino.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact