

Mounting protests, walkouts by US students against school shootings

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Protests and walkouts by high school students are spreading in response to the mass shooting that killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida last Wednesday. On Tuesday, as Douglas High students were traveling the 400 miles to Florida's capital, Tallahassee, to express their anger and demand a ban on assault rifles, students at other high schools in the state walked out of class in solidarity, chanting "Stop gun violence!"

Scores of students walked out of McArthur High School in Hollywood, Florida just before noon and hundreds more stormed out of West Boca Raton High School just after noon and marched the 10 miles to Parkland's Douglas High.

The Douglas High School students are planning to hold a rally Wednesday outside the state capitol. They will then meet with legislative leaders, including Senate President Joe Negron. Negron sponsored a 2011 bill, signed into law by Republican Governor Rick Scott, which banned cities and counties from regulating gun and ammunition sales. The Florida state legislature declined on Wednesday to hear a bill banning assault rifles, as students looked on from the gallery.

Protests by high school students have taken place in other parts of the country as well. On Monday, students from the Washington DC area protested outside the White House, calling on lawmakers to reform gun laws. More than 100 teenagers and their supporters staged a "lie in" outside the president's residence.

Students also staged walkouts at Cary High School in North Carolina and in Los Angeles, where some 500 people rallied at a downtown park on Monday to protest the wave of school shootings and government inaction.

Last Wednesday, using a semi-automatic rifle, lone gunman Nicholas Cruz, 19, took the lives of 14

Douglas High students, ages 14 to 18, and three coaches, one of whom was also a teacher. Students, teachers and families attended the funerals of four more shooting victims on Tuesday: Cara Loughran, Carmen Schentrup, Gina Montalto and Peter Wang.

Since the mass shooting, information has emerged documenting Cruz's severe and longstanding mental and emotional problems and the lack of medical or social support to help him.

In the wake of the horror of the Parkland massacre, the 17th school gun incident so far this year, students are seeking a political road to address one of the most malignant expressions of the social breakdown in America. According to the group Everytown for Gun Safety, this year to date has seen on average one school shooting every 63 hours, more than double the rate for the previous three years.

The *Washington Post* published a tally on Tuesday showing that since the Columbine massacre in 1999, 150,000 students at US primary and secondary schools have experienced a school shooting on their campus and more than 400 have been killed.

Protesting students have aimed their fire at local politicians, the US Congress and President Donald Trump. The group March For Our Lives has called for a march on Washington and protests in cities across the US on March 24. In its mission statement, the group declares, "March For Our Lives is created by, inspired by, and led by students across the country who will no longer risk their lives waiting for someone else to take action to stop the epidemic of mass school shootings that has become all too familiar."

The students who are protesting represent a generation that was born for the most part after Columbine and has known nothing but constant war, the glorification of the military, police brutality and

killings, mass shootings, worsening inequality, poverty and economic insecurity and the opioid epidemic—all expressions of the mortal crisis of American capitalism.

These conditions have been fostered by the reactionary and militarist policies of both big business parties, under Democratic no less than Republican administrations. In the aftermath of the Parkland shooting, as in every previous rampage, the response of the entire political establishment and the media is to cover up the roots of such tragedies in a social system dominated by an oligarchic elite and the military and intelligence agencies.

The Democrats are once again seeking to limit discussion to the issue of gun control, which they seek to exploit for their own electoral advantage. Meanwhile, they, if anything even more stridently than Trump and the Republicans, push for war against Russia and more military violence in the Middle East, and along with war, its inevitable domestic counterparts—austerity, censorship and repression.

Students must be warned against the efforts already underway to channel their protests against the fascistic Trump administration behind the Democratic Party and its own right-wing agenda and electoral ambitions in the 2018 mid-terms. The way forward is to turn to the masses of working people who are coming into struggle against the ruling class and both of its political parties.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to students in New York City and Minnesota about the wave of school shootings and the protests in response to the Parkland tragedy. Eoin in New York said, “The Parkland shooting was brought up at my school and there was a lot of talk about security in case someone comes in. But it doesn’t address why there are people doing this. A lot of the discourse right now is around security and gun laws. There should be a focus on some kind of preventative action to help these troubled students.

“I don’t think it does any good to show police and the military bursting into schools. It creates a feeling that you can just fight fire with fire. Kids are growing up seeing the military on their TV all the time. They see things being solved with guns, and that’s how they think their problems can be solved.”

Jie, a student at John Dewey High School in Brooklyn, said, “The glorification of violence is part of nationalism. There is a lot of focus on violence in

movies now, and it is a divisive issue. My feeling is that it is the social system that is pushing people to be antagonistic and see each other as enemies.”

Shea, a student at AFSA High School in Minnesota, said, “Students talked about this a lot, and it is scary. Most of the students even before thought about what we would do if a similar event happened here. It is like there is an infection and the shootings are like a boil bursting. It is a symptom but not the source of the problem. I think stricter gun control laws would be a good start, but I’m not sure if that will really solve everything.”



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