

Hundreds of thousands of students march against mass violence in America

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Hundreds of thousands of students demonstrated on Saturday in more than 800 March for Our Lives events throughout the United States and internationally. Demonstrations took place in every US state and on every continent except Antarctica.

An estimated 800,000 people marched in the main protest in Washington, DC, with crowds of people filling out the entire parade route along Pennsylvania Avenue. The second largest demonstration took place in New York City, where an estimated 150,000 people participated. Police estimated crowds of 40,000 and growing in Los Angeles early in the day. A crowd of 30,000 took part in the Chicago march, with thousands more in every other major US city. Demonstrations also took place in major international cities, such as London, Paris, Berlin, Sydney and Tokyo.

Student-led demonstrations of this size have not been seen in the United States since the mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War nearly fifty years ago. The scale of the demonstrations show that the profound crisis of American and world capitalism is working its way into the consciousness of young people and propelling a new generation into political struggle.

Young people who took part in the marches were looking for a political perspective that goes far beyond the narrow confines of the official debate over gun control. Students are seeking to make the connection between gun violence and the general social crisis in the United States and the violence of the American ruling class, from police killings at home to imperialist war abroad.

This was shown by some of the speeches by high school students at the main march in Washington, DC. Edna Chavez, a student from the impoverished southern portion of Los Angeles, called for the “root causes” of gun violence to be addressed, advocating better job opportunities for graduating high school students and “changing the conditions that foster violence.” Edna gave a heartbreaking account of losing her brother, mother and sister to random gun violence, and said that shootings are a fact of life that her “community has become accustomed to” for decades.

Other students who spoke recounted shootings that have affected themselves and their loved ones. Eleven-year-old Naomi Wadler spoke about witnessing an assault at a convenience store that broke out when the man in front of her in line found he could not afford the food he was attempting to purchase.

Students spoke with contempt for President Donald Trump’s response to the Parkland shooting, particularly his call to arm teachers. One Parkland student sarcastically compared it to arming priests, rabbis and other community leaders.

The marches stood as an objective refutation of the identity-politics portrayal of American society as fundamentally divided by race. Young men and women of all races and nationalities, all of which have been impacted by mass school shootings, participated side by side in the protests.

The determined mood among students stood in marked contrast to the politics of the Democratic Party and the associated organizations that organized and led the demonstrations. The Democrats have no answer to the broader social crisis that manifests itself in outbursts of homicidal violence in schools and workplaces. This is because the Democrats are directly responsible for these conditions, having presided over a massive rise in social inequality and two full terms of war under Barack Obama. Instead, the Democrats are seeking to channel the opposition of students behind the narrower question of gun control and to promote it as an issue for them to run on in the midterm elections in November.

The Democrats were acutely aware of the gulf between themselves and the motivations of the student protesters and sought to conceal it as much as possible. Protest organizers sought to carefully restrict and vet the speakers lists in advance. While Democratic politicians were conspicuously absent from the speakers list in DC, Democratic officeholders spoke at other rallies throughout the country. This included Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, who spoke at the Detroit march only days after voting with

Republicans to abolish banking reforms enacted after the 2008 financial crash.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality participated in the demonstrations throughout the country. The *World Socialist Web Site* provided live coverage, updates and interviews from the events on social media throughout the day.

Domenic, a high school sophomore, and his mother Susan, who is a nurse in a retirement facility, attended the DC rally.

“In the school district I was in last year, we faced budget cuts,” Domenic said. “I was in the orchestra as an artistic way of expressing myself. They always put that as the first thing to go. It was not removed in the end because I went and spoke for it. They also wanted to take out band and art. Without that type of activity at school, there's no way for students to express themselves, which can lead to more and more depression and mental health issues. I've seen the scars on my friends' wrists. But when they're in orchestra, they're the happiest people they can be.

“I think there needs to be some focus on the NRA [National Rifle Association], but we also need to focus on mental health and on schools. I also think there needs to be more of a balance. On a normal day you'll see a guy lying right there on the ground, because he doesn't have a home. You shouldn't see someone without a home and someone else with pockets full of money.”

Nick is an immigrant and high school student who attended the Chicago march. “Too many have died,” he said. “This is it, this is where we stand.”

Nick spoke out against the war-mongering in the media and among politicians against Russia, saying: “We have to stop fighting with Russia. We will never move into the 21st century unless America and Russia can see eye to eye and be the leaders that can unite this world together.”

Citing the opinion polls showing widespread interest among young people in socialism, the WSWS asked whether Nick and his friends had discussed the subject. “All my friends talk about it,” he responded. “They want this era of capitalism going into unnecessary wars to end.

“I mean, we went to Vietnam in 1968, and then in 2003 we went to Iraq. For what? For no reason? For oil? Students marched on Michigan Avenue in 1968, and 50 years later students are marching for the same things they did.”

Monae and Atiti are seniors at Impact Academy in Oakland, California. “I thought [the march] was very powerful because I thought it made the connection between militarization, police brutality and global warfare and gun violence on the streets ... and things like capitalism and money which funds [only] certain things,” Atiti said. “It all ties back to capitalism, and how everything is about greed.”

“I'm frustrated,” Monae said. “The fact that you're

putting war before our education? ... It's like you're trying to take our power and make us more ignorant.”

Celia attended the Los Angeles demonstration with her friends Luna, Winnie and Helena. She linked the question of mass shootings to the glorification of violence and the military in the mass media. “If you mention sex, it's automatically shunned. You hear things like, ‘You shouldn't be talking about that, you're so young.’ Yet we see literally everywhere guns and violence and murder and killing and all this, and it's just normal for us. And it shouldn't be, it really shouldn't be.

“In the movies it's just, ‘Well, we're at war, and that's normal.’... All the negative effects of violence and war aren't seen very often.”

Paul, a 16-year-old junior from Warren, Michigan, attended the Detroit march. When an IYSSE member noted that he has lived his entire life under war, Paul responded: “That's true. And I've been born to a century with these mass shootings too. I've never known what it's like without these mass shootings. Columbine, I wasn't even born, and then there was Sandy Hook, and I feel like Parkland, this one really hits close to me, because these students were my age.

“We're not as happy as previous generations. Because all we see is death. We see war, we see death, we see shootings, that's all we see. Congress was made to deal with these kind of [social issues]. That should be their number one priority, to make this generation have a better life than the previous one.”

Damon is a high school student who attended the march in New York City. “I think a lot of mainstream politics are not looking at the core of the issues,” he told IYSSE members. “I think a lot of the root causes go back to capitalism, and a lot of the issues like mass shootings can be prevented by socialism.”



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