

“No more wars, no more violence!”

Over 80,000 youth and students in Chicago protest against mass violence

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Illinois at Chicago
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The WSWS is posting a series of reports this week from the March 24 demonstrations against school violence. This report is from Chicago, Illinois.

Over 80,000 students and supporters descended upon Union Park in Chicago on Saturday to participate in the nationally coordinated March for Our Lives demonstrations against mass violence in the United States. It was one of the largest protests by young people and students in the city since the anti-war protests against the Vietnam War at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

Under the heavy control of the Democratic Party, the demonstration was officially touted as a gun reform rally. Almost every speaker during the event put forth the same formulaic solution to the endless wave of school shootings: gun control and voting.

Against the attempts by the Democratic Party to subdue and control the growing anger and radicalization of young people, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) spoke with students and youth who expressed their outrage against the entire political framework of the capitalist politics, including the Republicans and the Democrats.

There was a strong response to the chant initiated by IYSSE members: “No more wars, no more violence!”

Percy, a high school student who considers himself a socialist, said: “I think violence is inherently profitable for the American government. Violence is itself an extension of capitalism and is profitable to the top 1 percent. Disseminating weapons, which is the function of the NRA [National Rifle Association], contributes to violence overseas and domestically. It sows discord and class warfare and struggle, which does not have to exist. It goes to the root of capitalism.

“The function of both the parties is to follow the money,” Percy added. “The idea that we need gradual reform is not an idea that can exist with the significant need for immediate and drastic reforms. The Democrats and Republicans are not listening to the constituents. The power of the people is eventually the power that will need to replace government structures that are not working. Workers of the world, unite!”

“I’m here to protest gun violence and school shootings,” said Christine, a high school student at the rally. “This government is corrupt, and we need to make a change. For our future and our future generations. And we are the future. Inequality and violence go hand in hand. If we don’t have equality, then we won’t have change, and we won’t have a better future. It’s crazy how people wake up in this country and fear walking down the street. Teenagers need to be more involved, and that’s why we are all here.”

Sharmaine, an English undergraduate student at UIC, came out to support the high school protests. She spoke about the connection between mass violence and US militarism: “I think the government spends more money on military power and violence abroad and does nothing to invest in the population. None of our needs are prioritized. I think it goes to the nature of capitalism, which isn’t working for most of us.”

“I feel unnoticed, you know what I mean? Our opinions and lives don’t matter,” commented high school student Cameron on the mass violence affecting youth. “I think instead of killing people in the Middle East, we should fix the problems we have in America. No kid should go to school in fear of being shot. That’s just wrong. It’s not right. We should focus on the battle in America. The politicians are only worried about what’s happening out there [in the Middle East] because of money. The rich want to stay rich. That’s how it is.”

“This is too strong of an issue and it’s been ignored for too long,” said Monica, who works in health care. “We have to start with the basics, and that is the lives of our people. It’s not just the school shootings; it’s suicides, it’s kids getting in trouble, it’s all those things put together. Corruption, greed, poverty are some of the worst things we have. It just has to change.”

Monica said her husband has multiple sclerosis, and that they and their two children live paycheck to paycheck because of huge medical bills. “And of course I’m not alone. Whether it’s health issues, a child that needs rehab, a job loss, any of those things can set someone on the path to ruin very quickly, and there aren’t the safety nets out there that there used to be.”

Asked about social inequality in relation to social problems,

she said: “Of course it plays a big role! We all hear about it, those of us who are aware and watch, how much inequality is growing all around the world.

“Parents, children and teachers are the future of our society. You can’t muck with that, and they’re mucking with it way too much, so now is the time that everyone should come out here and protest. This is the start. It’s very important.”

When asked if she had followed the strike of West Virginia teachers, Monica replied: “Oh absolutely! And thank God they finally got some crumbs over there, and what kind of struggle did they have to do to get them. I just hope that power will eventually go back to the hands of the people. Somehow people have to find their voice.”

Dave, a public school teacher, and Sarah attended the march with their family. Dave said: “I don’t think that I should have to carry a gun in my classroom. I think that the fact that this keeps happening shows that there is a profound lack of will in our country to address this. Like my sign says, this isn’t the 18th century, this is the 21st century. The fact that I have to carry a trauma kit in my classroom is wrong. When money trumps lives, that’s wrong, and that’s why I’m here. If we don’t say something, then who will? If not now, when?”

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporter spoke about how the issues of escalating violence are bound up with inequality and the shifts in the ruling class toward militarism and war. The West Virginia teachers strike was mentioned to illustrate the mass opposition to inequality that exists in the working class.

Dave said: “The teachers only make \$35,000 per year! It is impossible to live on that.”

Sarah added: “And they buy all the supplies for their students, too. They take everything from education.”

Dave continued: “The next time I hear anyone say, ‘Well, we can’t have class warfare,’ well, class warfare has existed for a long time, we’ve just been on the losing side. The fact that Jeff Bezos can walk around making \$97 billion dollars while people that work for Amazon are making minimum wage is just wrong.”

Sarah said: “I’m so mad that J.B. Pritzker has won the vote for governor [in the Democratic Party primaries]. Another billionaire, just sucking up money! It’s not right. He’s not going to give us what we need.”

Shannon, a school social worker, said: “Since the Parkland shooting, we have had a lot of blackout drills and practices. As someone who works at a school and cares a lot about kids’ mental health, I want to make sure that this does not happen at any other school. There is enough money for mental health, it’s just not being spent the right way.”

Olivia, a high school student, brought signs to the march depicting text messages that students sent during school shootings.

She expressed hostility to the ruling class after discussing inequality and how it causes violence in society. “I feel that they need to replace them with someone who really listens to

what we are saying and wants to make a change,” she said. “I don’t like nationalism. I don’t like the idea of America First, because I don’t think America should be first in everything.”

Nelson, a high school student, said: “In retrospect, what hit me was that after I heard about the Parkland shooting, I wasn’t really surprised. This kind of thing happens so often across America. I was disgusted, but it did not surprise me.

“Republicans and Democrats alike are responsible for this,” he continued. “I despise nationalism. It’s probably one of the main reasons why we have war.”

In addition to the teachers, students and parents in attendance, many physicians attended the rally in their coats and ID badges, carrying signs about the impact of gun violence.

Marian spoke with the WSWS: “I’m a family medicine physician at UIC. On a daily basis I work with a lot of underserved populations, and on a daily basis I see the effects of gun violence with my patients. These range from PTSD, to depression, to problems with family instability that come along with high rates of injury and death.

“I have patients who are afraid to walk outside because they’re afraid they’ll get shot.

“Coming from somewhat more privileged background, I don’t think I realized the effects of it, but I have children who tell me they can’t play outside because they might get shot. This is our reality. There needs to be much greater awareness, and we need to effect change.

“It’s interesting you’re asking about the gun violence in relationship to the wars. ... I’m Iraqi. I left before the Gulf War really devastated the country, but I know many people in Iraq still. It is striking how similar some of the experiences my patients have here are to those that live in refugee camps, based on stories I have heard. I have not been back, but from what I know it is similar. It’s quite amazing to think we live in a country where people should feel safe and protected ... but they don’t and they’re not. It’s very interesting to think of this in relationship to the destruction and chaos that’s been created in the wars.”



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