

The international significance of the March for Our Lives demonstrations

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Saturday's March for Our Lives demonstrations mark a significant development in the growth of social opposition in the United States and internationally. In the midst of a wave of strikes and protests among teachers in the US, the UK, Africa and South America, as well as railroad workers in France, Uber drivers in India and Amazon workers in Spain, the mass demonstrations in the center of world imperialism are a sign of an intensification of social conflict worldwide.

Just over a month after 17 people were gunned down at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, broad anger over mass shootings and gun violence has triggered one of the largest mobilizations in US history. Well over 1 million people participated in more than 800 demonstrations in all 50 states and 390 of the country's 435 congressional districts, plus several protests overseas.

Protest organizers report that over 800,000 people attended the march in Washington, DC, far above their initial expectations and surpassing the size of the 2017 protest against President Donald Trump's inauguration. Tens of thousands more demonstrated in New York City, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, Denver and other major cities. Hundreds of protests also took place in smaller cities and towns encompassing areas of diverse cultural and demographic composition.

The large turnout and prominent role of high school students is a powerful sign of political radicalization among a generation of youth whose lives have been overshadowed by war, state repression, and rampant social alienation and dysfunctionality produced by the extreme growth of social inequality.

The attempt by the Democratic Party and the media to present the protests as limited to calls for "gun control" is fraudulent. While the Democrats intervened as much as they could to block demonstrators from

drawing broader conclusions, protesters who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality readily connected violence within the US to imperialist war and the social crisis.

To the extent the Democrats' calls for gun control won a hearing, it is because millions oppose the immense political influence of the fascistic National Rifle Association (NRA) and of the gun manufacturers who profit on the proliferation of military-grade weapons. In the United States, an 18-year-old can purchase an AR-15 assault rifle (the type used by the Parkland shooter) with fewer restrictions than required to obtain a driver's license.

Regardless of the pandering from Democratic officials, the chasm between the demands of the demonstrators and the actions of the political establishment is stark. In the days before the demonstration took place, Democrats and Republicans agreed to pass a \$1.3 trillion budget that will drastically increase funding for the military, the deportation forces and the police.

Both factions of the American ruling class are seeking to drag the American population into new wars with ever more devastating consequences. Trump has appointed John Bolton, US ambassador to the UN during the Bush administration, as national security adviser, effective next month. Bolton has advocated for war against both Iran and North Korea.

Meanwhile, the Democrats are waging a ruthless campaign to portray Trump as a stooge of Russia, demanding an escalation of the US war in the Middle East and preparations for a direct conflict with the nuclear-armed Eurasian power. While the Democrats mouth empty phrases about opposing "violence," Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer says the party

will not oppose the nomination of black-site torturer Gina Haspel to head the CIA.

The demonstrations proved that a new generation has arrived on the political scene. Many high school youth gave moving speeches, their voices filling with justifiable anger as they related stories of losing friends and relatives to mass shootings, police murder and street violence.

These are increasingly common parts of the American experience, particularly among working-class youth. American capitalism has unleashed an unprecedented degree of violence on the population of the US and the world. Since 2000, before most high school students were born, there have been 270,000 murders, 600,000 drug overdoses, 650,000 suicides, 85,000 workplace deaths, 12,000 police murders and 850 prisoner executions in the US.

Over roughly the same period, the US-led wars, launched for corporate profit and justified by lies, have killed well over one million people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere.

Millions were motivated to participate in Saturday's demonstrations out of a profound sense that something is terribly wrong with an American society so marred by extreme violence and a degraded political and cultural life. This explodes the official narrative of the Democratic Party, according to which the American population should be chiefly concerned with questions of racial and gender identity. All other social problems, according to this narrative, are invented and/or magnified by the sinister machinations of Russia to "sow divisions" in an otherwise serene American society.

None of these issues played a significant role at Saturday's demonstrations. No speaker sought to blame Russian President Vladimir Putin for the uniquely American phenomenon of the high school mass shooting. When student speakers in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles shed light on the extreme violence and police repression in impoverished African-American and Latino neighborhoods, they did so without presenting the violence in chiefly racial terms. One working-class Latina student, Edna Chavez, told the march in Los Angeles that addressing mass shootings required getting to the "root causes" of social violence. This meant "changing the conditions that

foster violence," she said, including joblessness, inequality and a deteriorating public school system.

In the United States, under conditions where the trade unions have suppressed the class struggle for the past 40 years, the fact that economic and social questions are beginning to predominate has immense international significance. The demands of students for an end to social violence coincide with the demands of their teachers in West Virginia, Arizona, Oklahoma and New Jersey for higher wages and more funding for public education.

The grievances of different layers, age groups and geographical segments of the working class are beginning to coalesce. The ruling class is terrified that the various demands of workers across the country and across the world will crystallize into a mass movement independent of the two capitalist parties. For this reason they seek to choke the avenue of communication—social media and the Internet—and censor left-wing websites from reaching a broader audience.

What is necessary above all is to develop within this objective radicalization a conscious, socialist leadership to organize the growing opposition of the working class, in the United States and internationally, into a revolutionary movement against the capitalist system. This is the task of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



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