

US students hold national walkout against school violence

Our reporters
21 April 2018

Students at an estimated 2,500 high schools and middle schools across the United States participated in a nationally-coordinated walkout against violence in schools on Friday.

The event was organized through social media by high school students from Connecticut to mark the 19th anniversary of the massacre at Columbine High School. Newtown, Connecticut was the site of the December 2012 mass school shooting that left 20 children between the ages of six and seven dead.

The walkout was the third major nationally coordinated student action since the Parkland massacre on February 14, when 19-year-old Nickolas Cruz shot and killed 17 students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. The protests of student youth are taking place at the same time as an expanding wave of walkouts by teachers.

The demonstrations Friday reportedly received financial and organizational backing from Indivisible, which is oriented to the Democratic Party. While the Democrats are attempting to direct the anger and opposition of youth into the midterm elections and calls for gun control reform, the demonstrations this year have revealed broad hostility to the entire political and corporate establishment.

Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) spoke with students participating in several of the walkouts.

Hundreds of students rallied in Washington Square in New York City. Briana, a senior at Brooklyn Tech in New York, told IYSSE members that while people are dying, “the politicians just stay silent rather than isolate themselves. They don’t listen to people our age... When the politicians do agree it is only to benefit themselves.” Asked if the school shootings were part of a broader problem, she responded, “I can’t say how violent the rest of the country is, but there is something in the culture

here. People can feel alienated, and there is an ease with which people can get guns.”

Triston, a junior at Harvest Collegiate High School in Manhattan, said that guns are mostly used to “cause harm and not to protect”, especially when considering the deep psychological and social pressures upon individuals. “Our country is so broken that it doesn’t give people the help that they need.”

“We have easier access to guns than we have to basic necessities.” He elaborated, “There are problems of poverty and oppression. People can’t get welfare and food, but they can get guns. You can also see the police shooting innocent kids.”

Nearly every student spoke of the lack of basic necessities and also the lack of art, culture and meaningful school programs. “Nothing is actually being done [in response to shootings], and a lot of schools don’t have resources,” explained Khalilah, a junior at Beacon High School in New York. He explained that violent outbreaks are much more common “if you don’t have stuff like an arts program to help students relieve anxiety. Some schools don’t have advisors or guidance counselors to help students.”

Scores of school administrations across the country threatened disciplinary action for those students who chose to participate in the walkouts. Some students held on campus vigils to avoid punishments. Others set up memorials. Students at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Maryland hung decorated shirts over the fence of their school for the 199 teens that have been killed at schools in 2018.

Hundreds of the 1,000 Chicago high school students who walked out of several high schools and met at Grant Park for a rally will be forced to attend Saturday school to make up for the missed class time. Similar reports of harsh penalties have come from schools in New York, Michigan, California and Texas.

In defiance of a threat of four-hour detention, students at a Chicago suburban high school at Downers Grove North (DGN) walked out of class and gathered outside the school building, then marched to a local park where they held a rally. Several students spoke and expressed frustration that no action has been taken despite massive demonstrations in the wake of the Parkland shooting.

Andy, a DGN alum and IYSSE member at the University of Illinois Chicago, was invited to speak. His speech addressed the social causes of mass shootings and the role of the US military in creating a culture of violence.

He told the crowd, "For every day that you all have been alive, your country has been at war. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Palestine, the pain felt by the Parkland and Columbine victims is felt every day. This is carried out not by rogue actors, but by bombs and guns paid for by the United States of America."

Andy presented an alternative to the violence of American society. "Instead of spending trillions on war, let's fund education, healthcare and create jobs," he said. "Instead of allowing a tiny handful of individuals to grind society into the dirt, let's build a new world, a socialist world, where the working class can democratically decide how resources are used. A world where war and death will never be an option. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality calls for an end to violence, an end to war, an end to poverty and exploitation. To make this possible we must fight for socialism."

Andy received a warm response from the students in attendance. One student, Hannah, said, "I agree with the perspective that Andy spoke about today. There's no other way but to be radical. This is not going to stop today for me. This is something that I am going to stick with until it is fixed. People think about the victims of school shootings as statistics and numbers and money, but that's not what they are. They are actual human beings. I think capitalism is BS. It's all about taking advantage of everything that people do."

Nick, a junior at DGN, told our reporters that he did not think that gun control was necessarily the answer to the issues of violence, noting that there were more fundamental causes: "There's also the issue of poverty and issues with the educational systems in some areas. When it comes to school shootings, I think it comes down to mental illness."

IYSSE members asked Nick for his thoughts on the billions of dollars spent on the military. "I think there

should be more funding for mental health support services at schools and more funding for schools in general, so people can get a better education and not have to turn to gangs."

During the march, a WSWs reporter spoke to Cosette, another student at DGN. "School shootings have a lot to do with mental health problems," Cosette said. "I think that if you're a problem kid, the school shuns you and puts you on the outside. When you're isolated like that, you just have time to brood about why you're upset."

A recent study by the *Journal of Child and Family Studies* revealed that mass school shootings have resulted in more deaths since 2000 than in the entire 20th century. There have been twenty school shootings so far in 2018, with 25 people killed, meaning that such acts of violence and desperation now occur on a weekly basis.

On Friday morning, before the nation-wide walkout began, one high-school student shot another peer in the ankle in Ocala, Florida.

Since the start of the year, 387 people have been shot by police, which is significantly higher than the toll of 353 at the same time in 2017. Major cities like Indianapolis, Denver, Albuquerque and New York reported higher homicide rates in the first quarter of the year. Rates of addiction, drug overdose, domestic violence and suicide are also increasing.

While students and youth have expressed their outrage at an irrational system that fuels violence and despair, the ruling class has only sought to boost the police state apparatus, prepare the ground for world war and a crackdown on democratic rights. The Trump administration, backed by Democrats and Republicans in Congress, has boosted the powers of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) to carry out an escalated program of data collection, internment and deportation of hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants from Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Congress also passed the federal budget, which slashed funding from social programs and increased funding for the military by \$17 billion. The Democratic Party is pressing the hardest for an agenda of militarism, police crackdown and war, including the unanimous backing of the bombing of Syria this week.



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