After Parkland: The militarization of high schools in the US

Alex Johnson
29 September 2018

The following article is part of a series of articles dedicated to exposing the militarization of schools and universities. To read more about the issues facing young people and to join the IYSSE, visit ***iysse.com***.

The February 14 mass school shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida was a significant political event in the United States. The indiscriminate killing of 17 innocent people provoked horror and outrage. Hundreds of thousands of young people, some not old enough even to vote, took to the streets to protest the killings and the indifference of lawmakers to the conditions that produce such atrocities.

Mass casualty incidents, or shootings where four or more people are killed, occur on average every 16 days in the US. Such a rate is more than ten times the average 20 years ago. School shootings have become a fact of life for young people.

After every horrific school shooting, political officials respond with hollow condolences and self-serving and empty explanations. In the aftermath of Parkland, the Democratic Party in particular worked to control the protests and focus them on gun control reform, covering up the real causes of mass shootings—the militarized state of American society, inequality, the general brutalization of social relations, the destruction of social programs and health care.

More than six months after the Parkland tragedy, nothing has been done to resolve such issues. Instead, as high school classes began last month, many students were met with what amounted to a militarized fortress, complete with armed police officers, chain link fences and security cameras.

At Douglas High School, the site of the tragedy last February, the Broward County School system has hired 18 additional security officers to patrol the hallways. The team includes full time police officers supplied by the county sheriff's department, campus monitors and "security specialists," according to the Fort Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel*. The publication notes that schools throughout the district are employing such enhanced security measures as well.

According to the *Sun-Sentinel*, "On the first day of school next year, there will be only one way to get in during the school day at 135 of Broward's 230 schools. Although many doors will be open for arrival and dismissal, signs and fences will steer visitors during the day toward a 'Welcome Center,' where they will have to show their IDs to enter the school."

The publication also reported that students and faculty are now required to wear their identification at all times.

Stoneman Douglas abandoned plans to enforce a policy of clear plastic backpacks, which were required in the aftermath of last spring's shooting, and metal detectors, on the grounds that such measures would create long lines and were otherwise unworkable. The school board is still exploring the possibility of introducing metal detectors and held workshops on the issue in early September.

The presence of security cameras on campus has been expanded, and a 12-foot high chain link fence surrounds the freshman building in which the then 19-year-old school shooter Nikolas Cruz opened fire with an automatic rifle.

The state of Florida has also launched a new app designed to anonymously report suspicious activity in the state's schools. The app, FortifyFL, cost state legislators $400,000 to develop and is a further step in an effort to monitor and essentially spy on students twenty-four hours a day.

A bill passed by the state legislature earlier this

© World Socialist Web Site

month allocates $58 million toward arming teachers in Florida. The Guardian Program, intended to train school teachers in the use of firearms, was adopted instead of Florida Republican Governor Rick Scott's proposal to hire more school security personnel. Not only are teachers and school staff deprived of resources to educate their pupils, they will now be given the additional task of acting as an armed security force.

The flooding of schools with weapons, guards and other security measures has had little practical impact in protecting youth in an armed shooter situation. A 2007 study published in the Journal of Criminal Justice found that hiring more security staff, implementing security cameras and metal detectors, and carrying out invasive locker searches, "did not have a relationship with school crime" prevention rates.

Instead, the measures are part of a general militarization of American society, in which all social problems are treated by the ruling class as an opportunity to increase the powers of the state.

High school students across the country are facing increasingly authoritarian measures. During the 2016-2017 school year, 94 percent of public schools reported that administrators were controlling access to school buildings by locking or monitoring doors during school hours. Eighty-one percent have reported using security cameras to monitor schools, and 25 percent reported using random drug dog searches on campus.

Camey Elementary school in The Colony, Texas recently spent $21.5 million rebuilding a facility with bulletproof glass on the front doors, 50 security cameras, and a panic button installed inside the main office.

Middle and high schools across the country have also seen a large influx of campus police officers, known as School Resource Officers (SRO) and School Law Enforcement Officers (SLEO). In the late 1970s, there were fewer than 100 officers in public schools. By 2003, that number exploded to 19,900. The National Education Association estimates that the number of SROs and SLEOs in schools today is as high as 30,000.

The influx of police into schools has taken place as the schools themselves have been starved of funds and resources. According to the U.S Department of Education, 1.6 million children attend public schools that have police officers but no counselors.

Since 2010, the Department of Justice has spent more than $1 billion to hire new police officers for public schools while the education budget was cut significantly over the same period, with support from both the Democrats and Republicans.

There have been dozens of cases of police violence and abuse of high school students during the past three years. In April 2017, a Pennsylvania police officer at Woodland Hills High School was caught on a surveillance video beating and tasering a student, knocking out his front tooth. In almost all these cases, the offending officers are merely put on paid leave.

A recent report by the *New York Times* documented that over 100 school districts and public universities have hired surveillance companies to monitor students' social media accounts. The majority of the private surveillance contracts were implemented in the aftermath of the Parkland shooting. Most of these spying service companies hold or have held contracts with police departments or have ties with the military and intelligence agencies.

Students and youth who were misled by the Democratic Party's calls for gun reform, a measure which leaves untouched the underlying causes of mass shootings and serves to strengthen the state, should take note of the reality that has unfolded. The Democratic Party continues to exploit the justified anger over mass violence by turning "March for Our Lives" into a campaign to "Get out the vote" for Democratic Party politicians, while politicians of both parties continue to implement more and more measures to militarize the campuses and starve the schools of resources.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site