

Nova Scotia gunman kills 22 in Canada's deadliest mass shooting

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In a horrific rampage across rural northern Nova Scotia, Canada, 51-year-old Gabriel Wortman shot and killed at least 22 people over the course of Saturday night and Sunday morning. Police officers investigating the deadliest mass shooting in Canadian history say the owner of a small denturist business in Halifax opened fire at 16 separate crime scenes before he was caught and fatally shot by RCMP officers in Enfield, approximately 100 kilometres from the start of his killing spree.

Indicating that the massacre was planned in advance, Wortman wore a mock-up RCMP uniform and drove a decommissioned police car outfitted to look as if it were still in service. Information on his background indicates that he had been a wannabe RCMP officer since his teens. One neighbour told the Canadian Press that Wortman purchased several old police cars over the years. He also reportedly collected RCMP memorabilia.

Investigators say most of Wortman's victims appear to have been chosen at random, but he began by targeting several people known to him. According to a police source cited by the *Toronto Sun*, Wortman first shot his ex-partner and her new boyfriend at around 10 p.m. Saturday, before getting in his car and targeting neighbours.

In the small community of Portapique, where Wortman began his rampage, several victims were found slain in their homes, and five buildings were set on fire. Although some victims have yet to be identified, the gunman killed a police officer, two frontline health care workers, an elementary school teacher, two correctional officers, a retired firefighter, and a family of three. The authorities warn that the death toll may rise when all the burnt-out buildings are examined.

Wortman owned two denturist clinics in Halifax and nearby Dartmouth. He also owned several properties, including a large home in Portapique, which lies around 130 kilometres northwest of Halifax. It cannot be said

whether the coronavirus pandemic and its economic fallout played a role in triggering Wortman's outburst of violence, but it is known that his businesses were closed under the province's lockdown. Although he has been described as a millionaire, it is possible that Wortman was under financial stress given the stock market crash and other recent economic shocks.

Because Wortman's bloody rampage was spread over a wide area, many Nova Scotians know someone directly impacted by the massacre. A Halifax anti-violence activist held an online candlelit vigil to allow friends and relatives to pay their respects without breaching the social distancing regulations in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

Whatever the immediate trigger may have been for Wortman's bloody rampage, the Nova Scotia mass shooting is an expression of an increasingly dysfunctional society. Riven by social inequality and mass poverty and led by a ruling elite mired in foreign aggression and war, Canadian capitalism is a brutal social order that regularly engenders outbursts of homicidal violence. Since 2014 Canada has witnessed a rash of mass killings, including several with links to right-wing extremism. These include:

- June 4, 2014: Justin Bourque opened fire on RCMP officers with an assault rifle in Moncton, New Brunswick, killing three and injuring two.
- December 29, 2014: An Edmonton man suspected of domestic violence killed six adults and two children in two homes in the city.
- January 29, 2017: Alexandre Bissonette, a student with far-right views, assaulted the Quebec City mosque. He killed six worshippers and injured another eight.
- April 23, 2018: Alek Minassian drove a white van along a Toronto sidewalk, killing 10 passers-by and injuring 16 more.
- July 23, 2018: A gunman opened fire in the Greektown area of Toronto, killing a 10-year-old girl and

an 18-year-old woman. Thirteen people aged between 10 and 59 were injured, including a teenager who was left paraplegic.

- August 10, 2018: A gunman opened fire in Fredericton, New Brunswick, fatally wounding two police officers and two civilians.

- July 28, 2019: A 23-year-old man in Markham, Ontario, killed four members of his family by slitting their throats with a knife.

During 2019, Toronto, Canada's largest city, saw its worst year of gun violence ever, with 760 people being shot, 43 of whom died. During one August weekend, there were 17 separate shootings. The rate of gun violence has tripled since 2014. In 2017, Canada-wide firearm homicides reached a 25-year high.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau offered, much like the Democrats do in the United States, empty platitudes in response to last weekend's events, and asserted that the surge in gun violence can be combatted by imposing stricter gun controls. "In regards to gun control, we took very serious commitments in the election campaign and have moved forward—and are moving forward on them—to ensure that we're strengthening gun control in this country," said Trudeau on Monday.

Aside from the obvious cynicism of such pronouncements, given that the Liberals have failed to impose any tougher gun laws despite being in power for well over four years, Trudeau's remarks are a deliberate evasion. The Prime Minister does not want to, and cannot, honestly discuss the underlying social and political causes for the surge in gun violence in Canada over recent years, because to do so is to indict the right-wing, pro-austerity, pro-war policies embraced by the entire political establishment.

The precipitous rise of social inequality and spread of absolute poverty and homelessness, particularly in Canada's urban centres, are one driving force of the increased violence. Since the Liberal federal government imposed the largest social spending cuts in Canadian history during the 1990s, all political parties have operated on a consensus of offering ultra-low tax rates for corporations and the super-rich and starving social services and the public sector with austerity budgets.

In January, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' annual report revealed that the country's top 100 CEOs earned 227 times more than the average worker in 2018, which was a record high. A report from the Toronto Foundation noted last year that the typical person in the poorest 50 percent of the city's population

made \$6,000 less in 2016 than they had in 1982, using 2016 dollar values as a measure. By contrast, the average person in the top 1 percent makes \$99,400 more than in 1982.

Remarking on the sharp rise in gun violence in Toronto over recent years, Wendy Cukier, head of the Coalition for Gun Control, told NPR in August 2019, "Absolute poverty is not necessarily a driver of violence, disparity is, so inequality in terms of opportunities. And we're seeing the divisions in Toronto increasing in recent years. And there's no question that that's driving it."

The glaring levels of social inequality are being ratcheted up still further by the federal government's response to the coronavirus. Trudeau's Liberals, with the support of all opposition parties, have bailed out the banks and big business to the tune of at least \$650 billion, all of which will be recouped by stepped-up exploitation of the working class and intensified austerity measures. Meanwhile, workers laid off due to the crisis are being placed on rations in the form of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, which pays out a mere \$2,000 per month for a maximum of four months.

Canadian society is also pervaded by militarism and war. Canada has been at war virtually uninterruptedly since the Canadian Air Force joined NATO's bombardment of Serbia in 1999. From Afghanistan to Haiti, Libya to Syria, and Iraq, Canadian imperialism has been implicated in a long series of bloody US-led wars of aggression and regime-change operations that have collectively killed millions and destroyed entire societies.

Politicians regularly declare that the great global problems confronting the Canadian ruling elite can be resolved through the force of arms. In 2017, for example, then Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland stated in presenting the Liberal government's new national defence policy that "hard power," i.e. war, was a key part of Canada's past and would remain central to its future.

The explosion of militarism and war has gone hand in hand with a glorification of the police and intelligence services in the name of the so-called "war on terror." Wortman's infatuation with the police was undoubtedly nourished by this general reactionary climate.



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