

Toronto school shooting leaves 18-year-old student dead

Sterling Oliver, Steve Hill
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Jahiem Robinson, an eighteen-year-old grade twelve student known for his bright smile and positive attitude, was gunned down on February 14 on the grounds of David and Mary Thomson Collegiate in the Scarborough district of Toronto, Canada's largest city. The accused, a fourteen-year-old boy who attended the same school, and who cannot be named under the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), is alleged to have approached Jahiem from behind, shot him and then chased after another eighteen-year-old boy. The 14-year-old attempted to shoot the second boy as well, but the gun did not fire.

The youth was arrested later the same day on his way to turn himself in to police and was charged with first degree murder and attempted murder. The firearm was not recovered. Due to the restrictions of the YCJA, the gunman's motive may never be publicly known.

Robinson played a big part in extracurricular activities, including culinary and drama classes. "Jahiem was a constant source of support to his friends at school. He was dependable, sympathetic, and always available to talk to those who needed him," Aatif Choudhry, the school principal wrote in a letter to school community. "No one could lighten the mood with a joke like Jahiem."

Toronto Mayor John Tory responded to the killing by tweeting, "Any act of violence which takes place in a school is both tragic and unacceptable....I want to express my profound sadness that the lives of youth in our city are being taken at the hands of gun violence."

Before returning to announcements of giveaways to corporations and plans for the reckless elimination of the remaining COVID-19 mitigation measures, the right-wing Progressive Conservative Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, tossed off a similarly banal tweet, "I am absolutely devastated to hear about the death of

the grade 12 student in Scarborough. We must work together to rid our communities of gun violence. I fully support the police as they investigate this tragedy and work to bring those responsible to justice."

The office of Ontario Solicitor General Sylvia Jones issued a statement which read, "We launched a multi-year Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy, which takes a comprehensive approach to public safety by focusing on prevention, intervention and enforcement, and are supporting police response with over \$185 million in funding.

"As law enforcement experts have highlighted time and time again, the only way to truly tackle gun violence is to crack down on the illegal guns being smuggled in daily at our borders and greatly increase the legal ramifications for those convicted of gun crimes."

The efforts by city and provincial officials to limit discussion of this tragedy simply to matters of law-and-order and the tired excuse of illegally imported firearms are aimed at diverting attention away from the underlying social and political problems associated with gun violence.

Widespread poverty and precarious living conditions, two years of ruling class indifference to mass infection and death during the pandemic, and over two decades of Canadian participation in unending bloody military conflicts have created a social climate in which outbursts of violence and despair occur with terrifying regularity.

In a somewhat different approach, Mitzie Hunter, the Liberal member of provincial parliament for Scarborough-Guildwood, wrote to the Minister of Health, Christine Elliot, urging the province to pass Bill 60, the Safe and Healthy Communities Act, and deem gun violence a public health emergency.

“By immediately establishing a public health approach to address the problem, this legislation will enable boards of health to develop programs and services specifically designed to reduce gun violence,” she wrote. “Key to this are community-based interventions, which can effectively contribute in proactive and preventative ways with local and culturally appropriate solutions. Importantly, Bill 60 would make way for increased community capacity to assist survivors and their connections affected by gun violence.”

The MPP would have workers believe that violent crime is an unfortunate, but somehow organic, part of modern life that can be ameliorated by mild social reforms within the prevailing capitalist order.

What all of these politicians refuse to admit is that criminal violence overwhelmingly has social and political roots that can be identified and addressed.

Canadian imperialism has been at war for the 14-year-old gunman’s entire life. His entire conscious existence has coincided with incessant claims from the political establishment and corporate media that military violence in Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Syria, and Iraq was the ultimate answer to all social and political challenges.

Scarborough has some of the highest child poverty rates in the country, with Scarborough-Centre, the location of the shooting, at a rate of 26.7 percent. This particular tragedy was the twelfth homicide so far this year in Toronto. Disturbingly, four of those have involved victims or accused under age 20 and two have involved accused under 15.

Toronto Police Service Deputy Chief Myron Demkiw has stated that between 2015 and 2020 the average age of those involved in gun violence was 25 years. In 2021, the average age dropped to 20. Kanika Samuels-Wortley, a criminologist based at Carleton University who specializes in youth and crime, warned against knee-jerk policy making that would lead to over-policing, telling the *Toronto Star*, “there needs to be a focus on addressing feelings of hopelessness about the future, mental health and trauma, inequality and lack of trust in institutions including police and school.”

After two years of the pandemic, which has devastated the working class while exposing the opportunistic greed of corporations and the ultra-wealthy, how are young people supposed to feel

hopeful about the future or trust in institutions? How are they supposed to take politicians seriously who shed crocodile tears about the shooting death of a student while allowing a deadly virus which continues to kill dozens of Canadians every day to run rampant in Ontario’s schools?

The political representatives of the ruling class have pumped virtually free money into the markets since the financial crisis of 2008 and now the bill is coming due, which can be vividly seen in the spike in the inflation rate. The working class, as always, will be made to pay through budget cuts and deterioration in wages. And now with the unfolding war in eastern Europe, which threatens to become a global conflagration, young people might easily slip into despair. The solution resides in the fight for socialism—a social and economic system that provides for the needs of the working class and places human life over the homicidal interests of private profit.



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