

Beyond the official clichés: The Texas school shooting reveals the advanced sickness of American society

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The mass shooting of 19 children and two teachers, and the wounding of 17 more people, at the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas on Tuesday was a genuinely horrific event. The students killed were 9, 10 and 11 years old, in the second, third and fourth grades. The adults killed, both women, were fourth-grade teachers. The perpetrator of the crime barricaded himself inside a classroom and opened fire with a lightweight semi-automatic rifle that he had obtained a day after his 18th birthday, one week earlier.

In the most immediate and direct sense, hundreds if not thousands of people will never recover from the damage done in this one incident alone.

The American ruling elite, its politicians and its media outlets, have nothing insightful or useful to say about this most recent calamity. Depending on party affiliation and the level of individual ignorance, they advocate gun control, more police repression or a return to godliness.

One had the sense that even President Joe Biden recognized that the normal assortment of clichés would only anger people and perhaps he had better keep his mouth shut. Biden briefly referred to the fact “these kinds of mass shootings rarely happen anywhere else in the world.” People in other countries, he said, “have mental health problems. They have domestic disputes in other countries. They have people who are lost,” but such killings “never happen [elsewhere] with the kind of frequency that they happen in America. Why?” Of course, he was unable to answer his own question, except by referring to the “gun lobby,” which explains precisely nothing.

Uvalde is a town of 15,000 people, 80 percent of them Hispanic or Latino, many of them poor, 80 miles west of San Antonio and 55 miles east of the Mexico-US border. But there is no “predictor” provided here by size, location, economics or ethnicity.

Mass shootings and other forms of anti-social violence are endemic to American society.

The statistical evidence is overwhelming, and appalling. The Gun Violence Archive has registered 214 mass shootings already in the first five months of 2022—including nine in the past week in nine different states. Overall, more than 17,000 people have died in incidents involving gun violence so far this year, through approximately 7,600 homicides and 9,600 suicides.

On the other hand, the Mass Shooting Tracker—pity the poor country that needs such a measurement!—lists 253 mass shootings in 2022, or 1.73 a day, resulting in 303 people being killed and 1,029 wounded.

According to that same source, in Pell City, Alabama last week, a gunman “fatally shot his wife & two daughters, ages 13 and 16” and

“died from self-inflicted gunshot.” In another incident, in Goshen, Indiana, on May 21, the “gunman shot 4 siblings, killing a 17-yr-old boy & wounding at least 2 other juveniles.” The perpetrator was then “killed.”

Other related figures are worth noting. The suicide rate in the US increased between 1999 and 2019 by 33 percent. “There were nearly 46,000 deaths by suicide in 2020, making it the 12th-leading cause of death in the United States. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), that same year, 12.2 million adults seriously thought about suicide, 3.2 million made a plan and 1.2 million attempted suicide in the past year.” (America’s Health Rankings)

Violence to oneself and to others mounts on every side. Some 108,000 people died in the US from a drug overdose in 2021, also a sharp rise. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates 43,000 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2021, a 10.5 percent increase over 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of homicidal government policy, has led to the deaths of more than 1 million men, women and children in the US since early 2020.

No honest observer, taking account of these numbers and the vast human tragedy that speaks through them, could possibly conclude that the Uvalde incident and others like it are merely isolated, individual episodes. Rather, they reveal a far-reaching, far-advanced social sickness.

“The suspect [in Uvalde] attended a local high school and lived with his grandparents,” CNN reports blandly, typically. “He had no friends and had no criminal history or gang affiliation. ... He worked the day shift at a local Wendy’s [fast food restaurant] and kept mostly to himself, the restaurant’s manager confirmed.” There was no obvious warning sign, until it was too late.

In New York City, in April, a man fired dozens of rounds in a subway car, wounding 10 people. In January, a woman was pushed onto the subway tracks in New York to her death. Last Sunday, a gunman shot and killed a 48-year-old Goldman Sachs employee “without provocation” while the man “was riding a Manhattan subway train to brunch,” according to police. “Completely random,” the cops added.

There are thousands of such “random” incidents a year. To push a total stranger off a subway platform—how is such a thing possible in a modern society?

But a society at war with itself, an enraged society, with a high level of depersonalized hatred ...

The social conditions, including inequality and the concentration of

immense wealth in a few hands, the endless wars, police brutality and murder, the indifferent official response to the deadly pandemic, all of this sets the general stage.

However, it is necessary to be concrete, historically and socially. The levels and varieties of animosity and resentment have not merely developed spontaneously, on the basis of the social crisis or even the outburst of official violence. The specific evolution of American society over the past number of decades needs to be considered.

In the first place, the US establishment, as part of its efforts at self-preservation, specializes in the stirring up of antagonisms, racial, ethnic, religious, political and more. The government and its accomplices in the media are always at work along these lines, seeking out scapegoats, poisoning the atmosphere. The “Japs,” the “commies,” “illegal aliens,” “pedophiles,” “Arab terrorists,” the list goes on and on.

Now, of course, the source of America’s problems lies with the “Russians.” If one could only rid this country’s stages, playing fields and airwaves of Russian opera singers, musicians, pop performers, athletes and more, life would return to its previously unspoiled and idyllic state. There is a continuous push to condition the population into viewing events and problems in terms of personal enemies. Every man *is* an island!

James G. Stavridis, retired US Navy admiral, currently Vice Chair, Global Affairs and Managing Director of the powerful global investment firm the Carlyle Group, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation and advocate of military aggression against Russia and China, tweeted on Thursday, “If you are only 18 and desperate to get your hands on an assault rifle—enlist in the @USMC [US Marine Corps]. If you can get in, they will teach you how to use one to protect the country—not to threat[en] its children.”

The criminal fomenting and manipulation of resentment toward supposed external and internal tormentors intersects dangerously with an intense degree of social alienation.

This has grown worse over the past several decades, but it is not a new phenomenon. Since the launch of the WSWs in 1998, which coincided with one of the first waves of school shootings in the US, even before the Columbine massacre in April 1999, we have been pointing to and warning about this trend.

In late May 1998, following a mass shooting in Springfield, Oregon and a number of other episodes, in an article headlined, “Alienation, adolescence and violence,” the WSWs argued that no headway would be made in grasping the truth about the tragedies unless they were viewed “as the outcome of a complex interaction between social life and individual psychology.”

We noted that a concerted ideological campaign had been mounted against the conception that environment played a significant role in shaping the individual, including the criminal and the emotionally disturbed person. “Instead the model advanced,” the WSWs wrote, “is that of the isolated individual who must make his way entirely unaided in the world, and whose value as a human being is determined by the degree of success he has selling his abilities in the marketplace.”

The WSWs pointed out almost exactly 24 years ago that alienation in social relations had “reached new heights. What does this mean concretely? Individuals increasingly feel themselves cut off from their fellow beings and indeed perceive other people as alien and even hostile to them. What does it take to kill another person, or group of people, as happened in Oregon? The youth [in Springfield] reportedly shot four bullets into the body of a fellow student lying at his feet.

This must mean that he no longer recognized his victim as someone like him, as one of his kind. Without, of course, consciously intending to, official society has encouraged such mental states.”

Every effort has been made, the article went on, “to cultivate a soulless society governed entirely by money and profit, to eradicate the elementary concern one human being feels for another. Intellectual life, culture, the pursuit of knowledge for the benefit of mankind as a whole, are held in low esteem. Individualism, greed and ruthlessness are venerated. This has had a material impact on the quality of human relationships.”

There is nothing to take back from these remarks. On the contrary, all the retrograde tendencies have deepened and worsened in the intervening decades. A gaping, ever-enlarging political, moral and cultural vacuum occupies the center of American society. The population faces desperate social conditions without a helping hand, indeed the ruling oligarchy makes a provocative platform out of its social indifference, constantly and publicly doing everything in its power to undermine empathy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, official policies have worked to weaken people’s concern with whether they get the disease—or whether others do. With some, a disturbing fatalism settles in. Expressions of solidarity are seen as a sign of weakness. Many are simply not equipped to cope with the complex medical and psychological dilemmas posed by the pandemic.

And the American ruling class dares to tell the rest of the world how to live!

US capitalism has exhausted itself, it is terminally ill and there is no physician to be found in or around the establishment. The widespread sentiment is developing, propelled by events such as the Uvalde disaster, that things cannot go on this way. The idea may not yet be a politically or socially articulate one, but it is occurring to masses of people that “this has gone too far. This cannot continue.”

And yet, at the same time, people may also think, “There doesn’t seem to be a way out of this.” But life, objective conditions are moving, shifting, maturing.

What will change things? Above all, the emergence of a social movement of a resolutely anti-establishment and anti-capitalist character. Such a movement provides a progressive, healthy outlet for the collective anger. It is not just a matter of argumentation, such a movement arises out of the experience of broad layers.

The class struggle, the conflict of millions of workers against the circumstances of their lives, is already transforming the situation. The socialist movement of the working class, based on an understanding of social life and its laws, and its potential, drives away despair and inspires hope. A revolutionary explosion is building up.



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