Separate deadly incidents at American universities highlight the ongoing epidemic of mass violence in the United States

Harvey Simpkins
15 November 2022

On Sunday, two separate mass killings at universities in the United States left seven students dead.

In Charlottesville, Virginia, a twenty-two-year-old student at the University of Virginia has been arrested and charged with second degree murder for the shooting deaths of three fellow students. In Moscow, Idaho, an unknown assailant used an edged weapon to kill four students at a home across the street from the University of Idaho.

The shooting at UVA took place near an on-campus parking garage late Sunday, as students returned from a field trip to Washington DC to watch a play. The three victims, Devin Chandler, Lavel Davis, Jr. and D'Sean Perry were all members of the football team.

Two other students were shot and taken to the hospital, including Mike Hollins, another football team member, who was shot in the back, with the bullet lodged in his stomach. Hollins had a second surgery on Tuesday morning and remains in critical condition as of this writing.

On Monday around 11 a.m., police arrested and charged Christopher Darnell Jones, Jr with the shootings. Jones was on the football team in 2018.

Jones' father, Chris Jones Sr. explained to a local NBC affiliate that about a month ago his son told him that people had been picking on him and he "didn't know how to handle it." He advised his son to ignore it and go back to school. "What happened? Why did it have to get this far?' his father said. "I don't know what to say except I'm sorry on his behalf, and I apologize. He's not a bad kid. He really isn't."

According to the UVA football website, in high school Jones, Jr. was a member of the National Honor Society, president of the Key Club and student of the year as both a freshman and sophomore.

In the University of Idaho incident, the four victims, Ethan Chapin, Madison Mogen, Xana Kernodle, and Kaylee Goncalves, were found dead shortly before noon on Sunday after police responded to a call regarding an unconscious individual. Art Bettge, the Mayor of Moscow, told ABC News that the deaths occurred between three and four in the morning.

On Tuesday, police said the students were killed in "an isolated, targeted attack" with an "edged weapon" like a knife. As of this writing, the weapon has not been recovered and no arrests have been made or suspects publicly identified.

Predictably, in the wake of these latest killings, the usual empty statements from politicians of both parties were issued. As the WSWS noted less than six months ago, in the wake of the Uvalde massacre, "Depending on party affiliation and the level of individual ignorance, [politicians] advocate gun control, more police repression or a return to godliness."

On Monday, Virginia Republican Governor Glenn Youngkin tweeted, "We had a horrific tragedy overnight at UVA, lives were lost and families changed forever. Due to the diligence and commitment of our law enforcement, the suspect is in custody. While there are still many details to uncover, let us lift up the entire community in prayer."

Virginia's US Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner chimed in with the usual Democratic talking points about gun violence while offering no real solution to the ongoing and escalating crisis of mass violence.

Kaine tweeted on Monday, "Heartbroken to hear of another Virginia community devastated by gun violence. Praying for the UVA community and closely

© World Socialist Web Site

monitoring the situation…We must take further action to make our communities safer." On Tuesday, Warner tweeted, "Thoughts and prayers are not enough. Gun violence continues to take too many lives. I strongly support honoring the lives lost to gun violence with action, and passing additional commonsense gun safety laws."

No bourgeois politician or media outlet is capable of seriously examining the underlying social conditions that produce the everyday eruptions of mass violence in America. To do so would call into question the capitalist system which, with its brutality and violence, produces socially estranged individuals capable of carrying out terrible crimes.

As Democratic Party officials make their ritual statements about gun control and "senseless violence" the party simultaneously continues to carry out and escalate a proxy war in the Ukraine against Russia that has already killed thousands and threatens to descend in a catastrophic nuclear war, not to mention their support for every war carried out by US imperialism in the last 30 years, with the death toll in the millions.

According to the Gun Violence Archive (GVA), there have been 599 mass shootings so far this year in the United States. The GVA defines a mass shooting as "four or more [people] shot and/or killed in a single event, at the same general time and location not including the shooter." Another website, the Mass Shooting Tracker, records 701 mass shootings thus far in 2022, which it defines as "a single outburst of violence in which four or more people are shot", with an astonishing 5,083 total mass shootings since 2013. Using the latter figure, the United States has averaged 1.40 mass shootings per day for the last decade.

Incidents of mass violence are on a rapid rise. According to the GVA, since 2014, the number of such events has more than doubled. That year, the archive documented 269 incidents. As of 2020, the number had increased to 611. This year will break that appalling record.

School shootings are also on the rise. CNN has documented 68 school shootings this year, involving at least one person being shot, with 15 occurring on college campuses. According to the network, school shootings have more than doubled since 2018.

Extreme social inequality, an ongoing pandemic which has killed more than 1 million Americans, and a ruling elite that glories in military and police violence have all played their part in stoking the escalating crisis of mass shootings. For young people in particular these deteriorating social and economic conditions have produced an unprecedented mental health crisis.

Last December, the Surgeon General of the United States issued a report warning that "the challenges today's generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating."

The report noted that "the pandemic era's unfathomable number of deaths, pervasive sense of fear, economic instability, and forced physical distancing from loved ones, friends, and communities have exacerbated the unprecedented stresses young people already faced." The report found that symptoms of depression and anxiety have doubled during the pandemic, with 25 percent of youth experiencing depressive symptoms and 20 percent experiencing anxiety symptoms.

Economic insecurity is also a major problem for American college students. A survey from the end of 2020 found that 29 percent of college students missed a meal at least once a week since the onset of the pandemic, with 35 percent reporting that hunger had impacted their ability to study at some point.

In the last thirty years, adjusted for inflation, tuition at public four-year colleges grew from $4,160 to $10,740 and from $19,360 to $38,070 at private schools, far outstripping wages which have remained nearly stagnant over the same time period. As a result, total student debt in the United States is now $1.75 trillion, with the average borrower owing $28,950.

Sunday's killings and the ongoing daily occurrence of mass violence is the most extreme product of a society riven by class divisions. It is only by ending the capitalist system which produces individuals capable of carrying out such actions that such "senseless" mass killings will end.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site