

US students walk out of classrooms nationwide protesting gun violence

Rena Cassimeda
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Last Wednesday thousands of students across the US walked out of classrooms to demand an end to school shootings and gun violence. The walkouts took place just over one week after the March 27 massacre of three nine-year-old school children and three education workers at The Covenant School, a private Christian elementary school in Nashville, Tennessee.

The recent Covenant school shooting last month is just one of at least 146 mass shootings in the United States this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive (GVA). The data show at least 464 children ages 0-17 have been shot to death in all gun violence incidents so far this year—nearly five a day—with over 1,100 injured. The GVA also recorded a staggering 6,154 children shot and killed in 2022.

On Monday, six people were killed and nine injured in a shooting at a bank in Louisville, Kentucky. The string of mass shootings this year includes an ongoing wave of school shootings in the US.

According to data compiled by EdWeek, there have been 14 school shootings that have resulted in injury or death in 2023 thus far. Ten people have been killed and 24 injured. EdWeek also notes a staggering 51 school shootings which took place last year that killed 40 people—32 students and 8 staff—injuring 100 others.

From the east to west coast, over 300 schools in 42 states and Washington D.C. participated in last Wednesday's school walkouts, according to a statement by Students Demand Action, the organization that coordinated the walkouts. Significant participation in Wednesday's school walkouts included university level, high school, as well as elementary school students as young as five years old.

Among the hundreds of students across Texas who walked out were high school students in the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District (UCISD), where nearly one year ago 19 children and two teachers were shot to death at Robb Elementary School.

A group of about 50 students from Uvalde High School participated in the walkout, some of whom had relatives killed in the Uvalde massacre. In a local media video posted

on Twitter, one student said, “We should not be worried about being in our schools where we would be shot... I should not have to be an unidentifiable body in a casket only recognized by something on my shoes!”

Another student shared, “My older sister told me to fight for what is right and I want people to hear my niece's voice because it was silenced on May 24...She's not here to speak for herself so that is what we are going to do as her tias [aunts].”

Trevor, a Uvalde High School student who participated in Wednesday's walkout, shared with the World Socialist Web Site that the protest itself was limited by the school administration from going outside. He said, “On Monday, the staff at UCISD emailed the parents saying that Wednesday is national walkout day so they would allow us to voice our opinions in the courtyard or the gym. About 50 high schoolers did so but the administration put us in the gym where no one could hear us.”

“The purpose of a walkout is to get eyes on the reason why you're walking out but administration wouldn't even allow us to be with our fellow students during this. After about 30 minutes, someone just said ‘walkout’ and so we followed suit because we were fed up with the administration not allowing us to even have our opinions heard,” he said.

On the issue of the increase in school shootings, Trevor said, “The increase of mass shootings in America I think has affected everyone in our nation. My generation hasn't known a time where we wouldn't fear a mass shooter in our schools. Kids are more worried about being killed in school and not about a big test coming up. The US needs some kind of change because kids shouldn't be worrying about dying in class.”

Students marched to the town square to the site of a memorial for the Robb Elementary school shooting victims. Students yelled, “No More!” and “Our Blood, Your Hands” while marching.

Pointing to the delay and inaction of the Uvalde police during the Robb Elementary school shooting last year, one

student shouted, “They took an oath to protect and serve us but all they did was let us die!”

The Uvalde police department has systematically sought to cover up the fact that police waited over 1 hour after shooter Salvador Ramos opened fire on children in multiple classrooms before entering into the school.

Multiple schools in Portland, Oregon, walked out of class Wednesday and marched through downtown gathering at Terry Schrunk Plaza and City Hall. Five Portland high school students have been shot in four incidents near school buildings since last October outside Jefferson, Cleveland, and Franklin high schools.

An estimated two dozen Colorado schools across the state participated in the national walkouts. Last month, two school administrators were shot and wounded as a result of a school shooting by a student at East High School in Denver.

Wednesday’s walkouts also took place after protests by students at the state capitol in Nashville, Tennessee, which began on April 3 also in response to the Covenant massacre. An estimated 7,000 students, parents, and teachers gathered to demand the legislature take action to restrict access to guns, including military grade weaponry such as the AR-15 which was used in both the Covenant and Robb Elementary shootings.

Indicative of much broader political crisis in the US and of broad-based attacks on the democratic rights of all workers and students, two Democratic state representatives who helped lead the protest were undemocratically expelled by the Republican supermajority in the lower Tennessee House.

The walkouts last week in Tennessee and across the US demonstrated genuine anger and opposition among youth in the US to the prevalence of mass shootings at schools. However, the walkouts were organized by the Democratic Party-affiliated Everytown for Gun Safety. The group, originally named Mayors Against Illegal Guns, was founded in 2006 by then New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg with 13 other mayors. In 2013 the group merged with Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. Since its founding the group has sought to direct mass social anger over gun violence toward appeals to the Democratic Party for legislative reform.

Young people can place no faith in the capitalist parties, the Democrats or Republicans, to stop violence in schools and society at large as their policies are incapable of addressing the real cause of mass violence and school shootings in the US: capitalism and the immense levels of social inequality which it has produced. Both bourgeois parties preside over a deeply rotten and dysfunctional society.

Many of the young people protesting have expressed outrage at the fact that the government has done nothing

after two decades of regular mass shootings. Major social problems in US society, above all war and militarism, mass inequality, and the total indifference of the ruling class to human life, have only deepened in the nearly 24 years since the Columbine school shooting in Littleton, Colorado.

Both parties have overseen 30 years of US imperialist wars abroad which have killed more than 1 million people and destroyed entire societies. The Biden administration has funneled more than \$100 billion in funds and advanced weaponry to the war in Ukraine, which every day threatens direct nuclear-armed confrontation between the US and Russia. And an even greater conflict with China is being actively prepared.

Meanwhile so-called “progressive” Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are moving further to the right as shown in her recent intervention at a school in the Bronx to recruit school youth into the military, and her vote last year to block a strike by railroad workers.

As the ruling class prioritizes bailing out the banks to avert the complete collapse of the US financial system, the divide between the ultra-rich and the working class has grown to an obscene degree. The total wealth of the billionaires exploded by over \$3.6 trillion in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic alone. And inflation, driven by the war in Ukraine and corporate profiteering, has left working class families heavily burdened with a cost-of-living crisis and devastating cuts to their income.

The US government, in response to the ongoing pandemic, has imposed a policy of mass illness and death which has unnecessarily killed over one million people in the US alone, including over 2,000 children. Millions have been left to suffer with the debilitating effects of Long Covid. The ruling class, whose interest lies in subordinating social need to capitalist profit, is as indifferent to life when it comes to gun violence in the US, as it is indifferent to life when it comes to mass infection, inequality and war.

What has become entirely clear is that if young people want any future at all, they must fight for it. Young people must turn to the international working class, the real revolutionary force in society capable of putting an end to all social ills produced by capitalism, and take up the fight for socialism.



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