

# **United States : Huge Youth Mobilization Against School Shootings - March for Our Lives**

jeudi 5 avril 2018, par [SHEPPARD Barry](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 4 avril 2018).

**On March 24, an estimated 500,000 people, largely youth, demonstrated in Washington D.C. against the continued mass shootings at schools across the country. There were some 800 cities and towns that saw solidarity mobilizations totaling hundreds of thousands more. In New York 150,000 took to the streets, 85,000 in Chicago and 55,000 in Los Angeles, to name a few. Many reports say that there were nearly a million in all.**

The spark that lit the pent-up tinder of anger and outrage against such shootings – since January there have been 18 school shootings, and many more before – was the response to the February 14 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Florida.

A famous quote by Antonio Gramsci sketches the background for such shootings : “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born ; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

This is true of capitalism throughout the world today and above all the United States. There are too many examples of this morbidity in the U.S. to list but these school shootings, unique among nations, is certainly one of them.

It was survivors of the Parkland shooting, that killed 17 and injured 15, who got together to plan national actions and sounded the tocsin. The call was picked up nationally in a short period of time. The first actions were walkouts in schools across the country on March 14, followed by the March for Our Lives.

The overwhelmingly young speakers in D.C. included many Parkland survivors, from 13 to 18 years old, who were universally acclaimed as very angry, determined, articulate and ready to “fight” as one of them said. I saw the speakers on Democracy Now’s full-day coverage (go to [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org) to view all the inspiring speakers). Parkland survivors were also featured at a rally of 20,000 in southern Florida, a short distance from Trump’s Palm Beach resort (his home away from the White House) where he was playing golf.

The Parkland survivors understood that they had to reach out to Black and Latino youth, who are victims of gun violence in their communities, including by police. One survivor said, “My name is Jaclyn Corin, and I’m proud that Parkland is my home. Parkland is the heart of this movement. But just as a heart needs blood to pump, my hometown needs the alliance of other communities to properly spread this message. We openly recognize that we are privileged individuals who would not have received as much attention if it weren’t for the affluence of our city.

“Because of that, however, we share the stage, today and forever, with those who have always stared down the barrel of a gun. I actually have a special guest for you guys, so I’m going to come

bring her up.” She then introduced nine-year-old Yolanda King, granddaughter of Martin Luther Luther and Coretta Scott King.

Yolanda said, “My grandfather had a dream that his four little children will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream that enough is enough, and that this should be a gun-free world, period !”

She then led the crowd in a shout and response chant : “Spread the word ! ... Have you heard ?! ... All across the nation ! ... We ! ... Are going to be ! ... A great generation !”

Another speaker was 16-year-old Mya Middleton, an African American woman from Chicago, the murder capital of the country, who spoke of her own experiences facing down the barrel of a gun.

Edna Lizbeth Chávez said, “Hola, buenas tardes. I am from South Los Angeles, California, el sur de Los Ángeles. I am a 17-year-old senior at Manual Arts High School. I am a youth leader. I am a survivor. I have lived in South L.A. my entire life and have lost many loved ones to gun violence ....

“For decades, my community ... has become accustomed to this violence. It is normal to see candles, it is normal to see posters, it is normal to see balloons, it is normal to see flowers honoring the lives of Black and Brown youth who have lost their lives to a bullet.

“How can we cope with it, when our school district has its own police department ? Instead of making Black and Brown students feel safe, they continue to profile and criminalize us. Instead we should have a department specializing in restorative justice. We need to tackle the root causes of the issues we face, and come to an understanding of how to resolve them.”

This issue of cops in the schools is one of many the speakers took on, as well as opposition to Trump’s proposal to arm teachers. Teachers marched with signs opposing this, and students did also.

Even worse, the National Rifle Association (NRA) has in the past proposed that students be armed, ostensibly to be able to kill a deranged student shooter first. But who would know who was shooting whom ? It would turn into a circular firing squad.

One major theme was fierce opposition to the NRA. This outfit likes to present itself an organization of hunters, target shooters and others who only have guns for self defense. In reality it is the lobby representing gun manufacturers, and opposes all restrictions on guns. It has great sway over Republican politicians and most Democrats too.

One sign at the south Florida rally depicted Wayne LaPierre, the notorious executive vice president of the NRA, with the label TERRORIST. The extreme rightist politics of the NRA leaders was expressed in a speech by LaPierre at a gathering of conservatives given after the Parkland shootings.

LaPierre’s unhinged speech centered on what he saw as the immanent danger of socialism and communism taking over the country, and only tangentially on guns. He bemoaned that colleges and universities include discussion of the Communist Manifesto and Marxist economics. He sounded the alarm that the Democratic Socialists of America have chapters in hundreds cities and campuses, and so forth. In something we haven’t heard from a major figure since the days of Joe McCarthy, he charged that the Democratic Party has been taken over by socialists. He said that he wasn’t just referring to Bernie Sanders, but to the whole Democratic Party.

He tied this into the question of guns by asserting that the socialists and communists want to take away the Second Amendment concerning guns as a first step to taking away “all our freedoms.” (The Second Amendment was not ever meant to endorse the kind of Wild West mentality we see in the massive shootings and killings by guns in the United States unique to this country, but that is another story.)

He was interrupted with applause at his points, indicating that many “conservatives” have really become the far right, the “alt-right.”

As is always true in new movements, there were many different viewpoints expressed on what to do in the many rallies across the country. In addition to opposition to the NRA and guns in schools, there were other common themes.

One was the demand that assault rifles be banned. In the Parkland shootings, an AR-15 assault rifle was used. Assault rifles were used in other mass shootings in schools and in other venues. Such assault rifles are quick-firing semi-automatic weapons that can be easily transformed into fully automatic machine guns. As the name implies they are offensive weapons used by armies, having nothing to do with self defense. They are useless for hunting animals for food because they would blow them apart. Their only use is to kill people.

An article in the New York Times after the Parkland shootings described the AR-15, closely patterned after the Army’s M-16, as “America’s gun,” beloved by “gun enthusiasts” across the country.

Another theme was the closing of loopholes where practically anyone can buy a gun at guns shows or through second hand sales without background checks, and other common-sense gun control measures. Of course, any laws passed by Congress concerning guns can and have been used to victimize Blacks and be put to use for other reactionary purposes, so any such laws should be carefully reviewed.

The background for these school shootings is the fact that the U.S. is a very violent country. The U.S. has been at war since 1941, continues to be so in the present, and there are threats of new wars.

The U.S. has more guns per capita than any other country in the world. People in the U.S. are ten times as likely to die from guns than in other “first world” countries. The figure jumps to 25 times for gun-related homicides.

The War on Drugs has created a huge capitalist business, although illegal, to meet the growing demand for drugs furthered by increasing economic despair. Since this is an illegal business, guns are used to counter police forces when these capitalist businesses don’t corrupt them.

Each illegal drug capitalist enterprise uses guns to protect its turf against competitors. The foot soldiers on the ground, often drawn from the exploited and oppressed who see no other way to survive, are the enforcers, another source of gun violence in many communities.

An example of official violence in the United States is the disparity between police killings in this country and many others. In 2014 for example, police in the U.S. killed 1,100 people. In the same year, police killed 14 people in Canada, 1 in the United Kingdom, 12 in China, and zero in Germany.

In these and other ways, including TV cop shows, the lesson is taught that guns are needed by “good guys” to kill the “bad guys.” No wonder some deranged individuals carry out mass shootings, feel justified since they see the lesson all around them that killing for “good causes” like theirs is OK.

This new movement should be enthusiastically supported and joined by socialists. These teenagers, while fighting for their own lives, are beginning to see the connections with racism and reactionary institutions like the NRA. Socialists can help them see the connection with what is wrong with the whole capitalist society.

Another aspect of these demonstrations was an emphasis on elections, “we will soon be able to vote.” The Democratic Party seeks to coral all this energy into campaigning for them. Democratic operatives were at the demonstrations signing up youth to register to vote. There is growing pressure on this all other social movements to get behind the Democrats as the “non-Trump” party in the November elections. This is to be expected given that there is no mass workers’ party of any type in the U.S.

Socialists can play a role here too, not only in explaining that the Democrats are no answer to Trump and the rightist Republicans, but in fighting for the movement to keep pushing ahead with mass actions of all types, in the streets, meetings, publications, etc. whenever the Democrats tell them to stop with the argument that such actions hurt their electoral chances.

There some indications that some of our arguments can find support among these youth. In the D.C., Boston and other demonstrations, there were no politicians invited to speak, although some were invited elsewhere. There is a spirit that was evident in all the actions that young people would not be told what to do.

One electoral slogan speakers advanced was not to support any candidate that accepts support from the NRA. We will see how this holds up concerning Democrats who do accept such support. In any case, we want to be there when the Democrats fail to deliver much, which they will do.

**Barry Sheppard**

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