

# ***Guns, Gun Violence, Youth Liberation— Perspectives***

Over the past year, *The Utopian* has carried discussions of guns, gun control, student actions around gun violence, self-defense of militant movements and armed self-defense of oppressed peoples.

Two articles relevant to these issues appear on the following pages. We hope they stimulate further discussion. The first article, 'Anarchists and Guns' appeared in the Summer 2018 issue of the *Fifth Estate*. The second article, 'Gun Control? No, Youth Liberation! Mass Shootings--School Walkouts--Getting Free' appeared in *Crimethinc* (March 20, 2018).

Direct access to the original versions of these articles can be accessed via the following links:

[https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ui=2&ik=60b4b74620&attid=0.1&permmsgid=msga:r4547013373021308390&th=164a58ce979d9c67&view=att&disp=inline&realattid=f\\_jjoxjpiv0](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ui=2&ik=60b4b74620&attid=0.1&permmsgid=msga:r4547013373021308390&th=164a58ce979d9c67&view=att&disp=inline&realattid=f_jjoxjpiv0)

<https://crimethinc.com/2018/03/20/gun-control-no-youth-liberation-mass-shootings-school-walkouts-getting-free>

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## Anarchists & Guns

“Workingmen: Arm yourselves and appear in full force!”

—1886 Haymarket leaflet

PAUL WALKER

**T**he initial clamor about controlling gun violence following the horrible mass shooting at Parkland, Fla. high school this February mostly subsided following huge demonstrations of students across the country in March and April. Young students appeared everywhere in the media advocating reforms, but no legislation has passed that will staunch the blood flow, and probably none will be forthcoming.

(As this was written, another high school massacre occurred in Santa Fe, Tex., followed by several other smaller ones that quickly disappeared from public attention.)

Liberal policies will do little to stem gun violence, and right wing proposals to arm everybody, led by the increasingly shrill National Rifle Association (NRA), only assures more killing.

Neither approach will successfully combat gun violence in a country steeped in a history of violence, where a third of the population owns 300 million firearms, and political limits constrain lawmakers to, at best, make tepid reforms.

While that mainstream debate continues, those who see the need for defense against a rising right wing current and perhaps for a revolution in a future period are involved in a parallel discussion about arms possession. If you oppose the political state what should be the stance toward legislation that would limit gun ownership and type of weaponry? Formal laws take the place of autonomous action in all spheres of life, providing both a protective and a repressive function. Armed might is the core of the political state. Without it protecting the ruling class and its economic and social arrangements, hierarchal systems from the first slave states to the current capitalist ones wouldn't have lasted long in the face of popular resistance.

However, the modern state mediates some of the worst abuses and natural consequences of an exploitative system. One can assume most anarchists, while opposing the state as an institution, are supportive of laws within the current sys-

tem such as those governing the environment, product and workplace safety, discrimination, speed limits, and crimes against persons, all of which are enforced by the same tyrannical system of cops, judges, and courts which victimize the poor and people of color, and repress expressions of resistance.

It is certain that anarchists and other revolutionaries share a concern about the daily death toll the proliferation of firearms exacts, but the question to consider is, are arms a special and unique category different from air quality regulation or no left turn prohibitions?

Other than the United States, most Western countries have strict requirements regarding weaponry, including ownership, type, usage, etc., resulting in gun death rates up to 90 percent less than that of this country.

All of the liberal proposals for background checks, mandatory gun locks and safes, prohibiting ownership by abusers, and banning semi-automatic assault rifles, if enacted, would probably reduce gun violence somewhat. However, even under that politically fanciful scenario, that would still leave a heavily armed population with a capacity to act out shootings against themselves and others.

When we move to a discussion on our end of things as to what position should be taken regarding gun ownership, a whole different set of concerns come into the equation. It takes place in a context far from the understandable liberal dismay at the repeated mass shootings, one that considers the consequences of a disarmed population unable to protect workers and minorities against a tyrannical government, racist or right-wing mobs, or the ability to defend a revolution.

Historically, anarchists have admired armed revolutionaries, on the European barricades of 1848, at the 1871 Paris Commune, the revolutionary resistance to the Bolsheviks by the Makhnovist movement and Kronstadt garrison, and the most frequently cited example, our comrades of the anarchist militias in Spain who fought both fascists and Stalinists in the defense of the revolution they created in the 1930s.

## THE QUESTION HERE IS WHAT WORKS FOR ORGANIZING DEFENSE OF ONE'S SELF AND COMMUNITY AND A REVOLUTION

The John Brown Gun Clubs have been active in meeting armed rightists on their own terms. [redneckrevolt.org](http://redneckrevolt.org)



In the U.S., African Americans frequently employed armed resistance to white racist terror following the Civil War and into the 1960s. Workers in the coal fields of West Virginia and Kentucky fought cops, National Guard, and company goons to defend their unions or the right to organize in the 1920s. In 1886, anarchist labor leaders called upon their members to "Arm yourselves and appear in full force," at a rally in Chicago's Haymarket Square. Many did, but following a bomb blast and ensuing gunfire that left scores dead and wounded, four anarchists were hanged by the state of Illinois.

**HUEY NEWTON, CHAIRMAN OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY** in the 1960s, famously urged oppressed black people to, "Pick up the gun!" The specter of armed African Americans confronting brutal urban police forces led to a murderous campaign of repression against the party resulting in the deaths of dozens of Panthers in spectacular shoot-outs across the country, and an eclipse of their non-violent community based programs.

The 1921 so-called Tulsa Race Riot was actually a white mob and police attack against a prosperous African American district. Black World War I veterans and members of the African Blood Brotherhood bravely built barricades to defend their neighborhoods against the marauders.

The resistance against the mobs was so intense that white city officials aerial bombed the defenders, burning the black section to the ground, killing hundreds.

The third aerial bombing of the U.S. (the second being Pearl Harbor) came in 1985 when a Philadelphia police helicopter dropped an incendiary device on the communal living space of the MOVE organization following a pitched gun battle with authorities trying to serve arrest warrants including ones for arms possession. The resulting fire killed eleven MOVE members including five children and destroyed 65 houses. Many of the black liberation group's members remain

in prison serving long sentences. (See article in this issue.)

All of these examples (hundreds more exist) were heroic struggles against oppression and exploitation, yet almost all of them were scenes of great bloodshed and usually defeat of the radical forces pitted against the ruling powers.

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was originally proposed by its Framers to guarantee states the right to raise militias to suppress slave uprisings and armed white revolts such as Bacon's and Shay's Rebellions. In recent years, its alleged ambiguity has morphed explicitly into a right of personal gun ownership, and increasingly advocated by the NRA to expand an armed population. However, the Framers also saw the necessity for having every white male armed in an era when they had a palpable fear of slave rebellions and Indian attacks. That siege mentality still exists among many whites, particularly ones who are armed.

**THE QUESTION HERE IS WHAT WORKS** for organizing defense of one's self and community and a revolution if that comes to pass. Just as in day-to-day organizing, we evaluate what works partly by examining the strategies and tactics of past campaigns so we don't repeat the same mistakes. What does this say about the efficacy of arming for revolution or for even community self-defense?

The first line of defense for capitalism and the political state once threatened is the police who are increasingly militarized. The cops of yore did damage enough when armed only a little better than their challengers, but now they possess military grade armaments including tanks and a variety of sophisticated weapons, surveillance, and command capacity.

Were the cops to fail in efforts to halt a mass based movement demanding revolutionary change, the final level of protection of the state is its regular armed forces who could easily overcome any popular-based revolution or resistance. A modern revolution could only occur if sections of the military

joined the revolution.

Regarding defense against fascist threats to our movements on a daily basis, let alone for revolution or even radical reform: We are currently way outgunned. There are ten million AR-15 assault rifles owned by Americans. How many can we estimate are in the hands of, in general, Trump supporters, or narrowing it to extreme rightists and open fascists compared to how many are possessed by anarchists or leftists? The math is not encouraging.

Employing increasingly strident, far right-wing rhetoric, the NRA with its five million armed members, could easily be transformed into fascist militias as happened after World War I when the German Freikorps, a right-wing para-military, was used by the government to suppress revolutionary upsurges.

Currently, on the left, there are small gun groups like Guerrilla Mainframe and the Huey P. Newton Gun Club, which oppose police brutality and advocate for the rights of black gun owners.

Also, there is Redneck Revolt, an anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-fascist group which organizes white working-class people and has more than 33 local chapters, an off-shoot of the John Brown Gun Clubs. They've appeared armed at Trump rallies in the manner rightists have elsewhere. Left groups are all under heavy police surveillance. The co-founder of the two black organizations, Rakem Balogun, was recently locked up for five months without bail on suspicion of "domestic terrorism."

It's hard to say what this suggests doing. We are clearly outgunned both by the state and the right. Should historic defeats encourage us to submit without a struggle? Should we depend upon the state to protect us from rightist assault? The answers to these questions are obvious.

**HARDER QUESTIONS ARE, SHOULD ANARCHISTS OPPOSE ANY RESTRICTIONS** on gun ownership other than background checks, or even that? Should we see the Red Neck/John Brown Gun Clubs as a model of armed resistance against an increasingly crazed right wing which has no debate about the issue of guns?

In answering this, we should be aware that there will be 35,000 U.S. gun deaths in a given year with 100,000 people wounded. If anarchists were as armed as are current gun owners, would we be any safer from murdering one another, taking our own lives, and shooting others accidentally? Probably not. (Full disclosure: I own three weapons, and do not want to surrender them.)

However, revolution has always been an undertaking filled with risks and the future is uncertain as to what will occur as this country's politics get crazier. It's been said that we should have a big tool box, one which includes a multitude of resources of which guns at a particular time could be useful ones.

Most revolutions are thought of as extremely violent events, but the act of revolution by itself, the wheel turning over the old society and bringing the new one to the top, is usually fairly non-violent. In Russia and Spain, for instance, revolutionary ideals supplanted the conventional norms of capitalism and the state as workers and peasants simply began life without bosses and cops. It was the defense of those new forms in which so many lives were lost.

No one from the *Fifth Estate* offers advice as to whether gun possession is appropriate or not, and certainly not this writer. The most appropriate tools are those which have always led towards revolution—organizing around greater freedom, protecting those most at risk from racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia, supporting struggles in the workplace and the community, and subverting loyalty to the empire, its military, and its wars.

Once we see where this has brought us, it will be an organic process of deciding the best means of defense.

Paul Walker is a long time friend of the *Fifth Estate* who lives in the Detroit area.

**Support still needed for those arrested at Trump's 2017 Inauguration**

## **J20 Trials Continue to Drag on**

**ANONYMOUS**

**B** By the time this is published, the J20 trials, the prosecutions of protesters mass arrested at Trump's inauguration in January 2017, will likely be in full swing.

Despite having charges dismissed against 129 of the 230 people indicted and the first trial resulting in unanimous acquittals for six defendants in January, the US Attorney's office has doubled down on its year and a half long legal effort to prosecute the 59 remaining defendants.

The 59 are those who the government claims to have specific evidence against that they either destroyed property, organized the demonstration, or knowingly engaged in black bloc tactics. The cases against these individuals will be tried in groups of five and six through October of this year.

A major development in the case was a filing by the US Attorney that government wanted to call as a so-called expert witness, an FBI agent who spent two years in "an undercover capacity" infiltrating an "anarchist extremist group" in New York City from 2008 to 2010.

During that investigation, the agent participated in a black bloc action dur-

# ***Gun Control? No, Youth Liberation!***



## **The New Normal**

Another mass shooting. We're horrified, but we can't say we're surprised. These shootings have been going on for as long as we can remember. The victims at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School weren't even born when Columbine happened—and mass shootings have only gotten worse since then. Four of the ten deadliest mass shootings in American history have taken place in the last two years.

Why the last two years? The answer tells us a lot about this society. 2016 and 2017 saw a wave of backlash against the struggles and visibility of queer and trans people, women, and people of color, especially the Black Lives Matter movement.

The reactions came in many forms: “men’s rights,” the alt-right, the Trump campaign. But all of them were based in the anxiety that straight, white men are losing their power over society—and it’s no secret that mass shooters tend to be angry white men with a history of hating women.

Dylann Roof, who killed nine people at a black church in South Carolina in 2015, left behind a manifesto claiming that black people are inferior and bemoaning the supposed “disappearance” of the white race.

Omar Mateen, who killed 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016, was training to become a police officer. He had physically abused his former wife on a regular basis.

Stephen Paddock, the white Trump-supporting millionaire who carried out the deadliest civilian mass shooting in American history in 2017 in Las Vegas, was notorious for berating his girlfriend in public.

Devin Kelley, who beat his wife and stepchild while in the Air Force, looked up to Dylann Roof and copied his attack, entering a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas in 2017 and shooting over forty people—25 of them fatally.

Nikolas Cruz, who killed 17 students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, posted comments online degrading Muslims and threatening to kill anti-fascists. His classmates knew that he wore a MAGA hat, had been abusive to his ex-girlfriend, and had assaulted her boyfriend and called him racial slurs. Later, it was discovered that Cruz carved swastikas into the ammunition magazines he used on the day of the shooting.

### **The Old Normal**

The problem of mass shootings goes much deeper than just the last couple of years. It cuts to the heart of American culture. Our whole society is built on a competition to take power *over* others: rich over poor, politicians over citizens, men over women and gender non-conforming people, white people over people of color. Politicians on both sides of the gun control debate agree on the need for more resources to diagnose and treat mental illness; but the desire to have power over others is not a mental illness, it’s a social one. Mass shootings will continue as long as this competition for power is the basis of our society.

The US government is holding **2.3 million people** captive in prison—as many people as there were in the Soviet gulag system at its peak. Police routinely brutalize and murder people of color with impunity. In 2017, cops shot and killed almost a thousand people, over twice the number of people who died in mass shootings that year. Where are the Democrats clamoring for gun control when cops routinely shoot unarmed teens?

The United States itself was founded on genocide, slavery, and white supremacy. Last year's shooting in Las Vegas may have been the deadliest *civilian* shooting in US history, but the two deadliest gun massacres on American soil were carried out by the military—against former slaves in the Fort Pillow Massacre and against the Lakota Nation in the Wounded Knee Massacre. Soldiers shot between 200 and 300 people in each. We won't even mention the countless invasions, coups, and massacres that the US has perpetrated elsewhere around the world.

White people have carried out some of the most violent acts in the history of the world, but you don't hear them described as terrorists when they shoot up a school or bomb another country. Why? Violence directed down the hierarchy gets normalized and becomes invisible, while violence from those lower on the hierarchy against those above them provokes shock and outrage.

This is why those in power cannot offer real solutions—they're too invested in the same system of power that causes mass shootings.

### **Breaking the Norms**

What's different this time is that instead of waiting for solutions from leaders, one of the groups targeted by mass shootings—students—took power back into their own hands. **Not power over, but power with each other.**

In the days after the Parkland shooting, teens across the country walked out of their schools. On the one-month anniversary, the largest school walkouts since the civil rights movement took place. It's only thanks to disruptive *direct action* outside the normal political channels that the topic of mass shootings has remained part of the national conversation.

Authorities have responded by threatening suspension in some school districts and imposing limits on the walkouts in others. (“OK, but just for 17 minutes.”) In Florida, politicians and even the NRA hurriedly responded to student demands in order to seem relevant. Whether they were for or against gun control, they all wanted to send the same message: “You have to go through *us* to change things.”

It’s time to stop depending on adults who are invested in America’s system of power to solve the problems it produces. It’s time for young people to get together and set out on a different path.

### **Gun Control Is a False Solution**

Gun control is a false solution—and not for the reasons you hear from the NRA. In fact, the NRA has backed the most significant steps towards gun control **in order to impose limits on black people’s efforts to achieve liberation.**

The NRA was founded in 1871, immediately after the original version of the KKK was outlawed. One of their primary goals was to keep guns out of the hands of recently freed slaves. Later, in the South, the NRA crafted the legislation and licensing schemes that denied Martin Luther King, Jr. the weapon he applied for after his house was firebombed. You’d never know it from NRA propaganda, but modern gun control began when the NRA backed Ronald Reagan in outlawing open carry in California in order to disarm the Black Panthers’ armed citizen patrols.

The United States government is racist—its cops are racist, its courts are racist, and any new laws they pass will be used chiefly against the poor people and people of color who are always targeted by the state. More laws won’t protect us when it’s the same racist system enforcing them.

### **School Security Is a False Solution**

Making schools even more like prisons won’t give us freedom *or* safety. School is already violent. Teachers focus on obedience more than education, administrators control where you can be and when, school cops routinely brutalize and



criminalize students. The cop at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School did *nothing* when he was needed most!

There is no safety without self-determination. The people who knew best about the threat that Nikolas Cruz posed were his own classmates—they knew about his bigotry, the threats he repeatedly made, and the way he was abusive to his ex-girlfriend. The solution is not to deputize students to report on each other to adults, but to take that power from teachers and administrators and school security and give it back to the students themselves. Students should have power over their lives and the conditions of their education.

**Mental health efforts aren't enough.** The alienation we feel from each other in a world mediated by technology and the ways the economy and the school system condition us to compete against each other can make *anyone* feel worthless, helpless, and desperate for power. We need to create a society in which our self-worth isn't based on competition, in which each person's well-being is understood to depend on everyone else's.

Linking mental health efforts to state control, surveillance, and incarceration will just give the state another tool to increase incarceration and social control. The government doesn't sincerely care about stopping mass shootings—they've been getting worse for decades now without any change coming from the halls of power.

### **What You(th) Can Do**

**Try youth liberation!** If you can shut down your school, why not downtown? Why not the highway? The economy itself? The same people who are letting oil companies poison our water, helping racist police get away with murder, keeping us from getting the health care we need, and trying to force us back into the boxes of gender—they're the ones who want students to stay in their place, obeying orders and conforming and regurgitating what teachers tell you. Administrators need students for their schools, but *you* don't need *them*.

Start a secret club for the abolition of principals. Form a union to defend students from authoritarian administrators. Host viewing parties or reading groups about cool ideas and discuss

what you would want to do and learn if you were *in control of your own lives*. Students like you have organized assemblies in Quebec, forced back police lines in Chile, shut down airports in Mexico, and stood up to tanks in Tiananmen Square. You can network with young people around the world who are rebelling against the same things. Talk to each other, learn from each other's efforts, and take that inspiration to the place you live. Adults might be able to help you with these things—provided they're not too busy trying to *control everything*—but they can't do them for you.

**Solidarity!** The student-led fight to end mass shootings connects to lots of other struggles for liberation. People working against police oppression can tell you how cops perpetrate and exacerbate gun violence in black communities. Anti-fascists can tell you how they track white supremacists who aim to promote the toxic masculinity and white resentment that cause mass shootings. Agitators from worker-led unions can share ideas about how to organize and make decisions collectively. Women and gender non-conforming people who practice self-defense can share techniques that young people can use too.

Show up to other actions against oppression. See what you can learn—and what you can offer.

### **To the Students**

Don't hold back. You don't have to wait until you're 18—or for the elections if you're over 18—to get organized and take action. This is your chance. RIGHT NOW. Don't let adults set limits on your imagination. Don't let political parties or school boards tell you what counts as appropriate protest. They can't run those schools without you. Together, we can make the changes they never will.

*Crimethinc* (March 20, 2018)

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