

RECENT MASS SHOOTINGS IN THE USA – WHERE HATE AND GUN VIOLENCE CONVERGE

June 7 2022



The deaths of 19 children and two teachers at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, was shockingly the 27th school shooting in the United States in 2022. While those of us who are parents can feel the sorrow and grief of those mothers who will never see their children again, we are reminded that things do not have to be this way.

School shootings are preventable. Many US gun control activists have been lobbying for stricter gun reform but are facing massive hurdles from the Republicans and pro-gun lobbyists. The recent shootings in Buffalo and in Texas both had one thing in common - it was a young man - eighteen years old - who held a firearm and shot at innocent victims.

In an era where the alt-right and online hate communities are aggressively organizing impressionable young people (who are mis-placing their feelings of social and economic uncertainty), easy access to a gun can infinitely increase the scale of harm. When they fall victim to this rhetoric of hate and racism (sometimes also affected by mental health challenges), human lives as innocent as those of children, grocery shoppers in Buffalo, and worshippers at a Taiwanese church die - as we have all witnessed just this past month of May 2022.

While we don't have a perfect track record here in Canada on gun violence as witnessed by the 2012 Danzig shooting in Toronto, the mosque shooting in Quebec in 2017 and the Danforth shooting in 2018, we can applaud the work of coalitions in this country who worked tirelessly on gun control and on preventing violence against women. Beginning with the Montreal Massacre in 1989, many unions began the hard work to end violence against women. They joined other coalitions to restrict gun control and to prevent domestic violence. These coalitions, with prominent unions leading, advocated and won the long-gun registry which prevented gender-based violence and saved many women's (and children's) lives. This is an example of how unions fought and won on societal issues, not just those at the bargaining table.

In 2010, Julie White, the former CAW director of Women's Programs, stated: "Rifles and shotguns figure prominently in gender based violence in our communities. We have heard from women and from men across the country of the terrible tragedies of guns in the wrong hands, of the cycle of threats and abuse that many women and their children experience, at the end of a gun barrel. For every woman killed, there are hundreds who are terrorized in their own homes. There is clear evidence that the long gun registry is saving women's lives."

In spite of the long success of Canada's long-gun registry since 1995, Stephen Harper - during the tenure of the Conservative government - scrapped the registry on April 5th, 2012.

Since then, the number of firearms imported into Canada have skyrocketed, and we have witnessed in recent years our own share of mass shootings within Canada, and school shooting scares.

This Labour Council has repeatedly called for a comprehensive strategy to tackle gun violence and its causes which include tackling the roots of poverty such as addressing systemic racism in the job market and investing in strong social services. Alongside greater control of firearms in this country, the provincial government can take steps to update labour laws and make it easier for workers to form unions and gain better wages and benefits.

Young people, who are disillusioned by the social and economic disparities revealed in this pandemic, need to see a hopeful future for themselves where our economy's vision is for all workers to have full-time, stable jobs instead of an unending cycle of precarious gig work.

The creation of good jobs coupled with strong social services with mental health supports would also create stable conditions for our youth, giving hope to young people who may otherwise be drawn to destructive choices. We have seen the success of the Community Benefits approach combined with pre-apprenticeship programs in offering such opportunities.

We know there is no one action that will solve the problem of gun violence. But we can start immediately by demanding that the Federal government restore all restrictions on gun purchase and registration and place a complete ban on handguns and assault weapons into effect. We can also start demanding our Province to update their labour laws to make it easier for workers to join unions, which is the first step towards a prosperous future for ourselves and our communities.

Therefore, Labour Council Executive Board resolves that:

- all delegates and affiliates recommit themselves to taking action to eradicate Anti-Black, Anti-Indigenous and other forms of racism and hate within our unions, our workplaces and within society
- we begin naming White Supremacy and making it visible in the actions of perpetrators, such as being the motive for the Buffalo shooter
- all affiliates call on the Province to update progressive, worker-friendly labour laws that will make it easier for workers to join unions
- all affiliates call on the Province to adequately fund social services and expand access to mental health supports
- all affiliates call on the Federal government to reinstate the long form gun registry

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