

What is revealed in the school massacre in Winder, Georgia

Patrick Martin
5 September 2024

Once again, as has been the case for the past 25 years, a mass shooting at a school has provided a demonstration of the savage violence lying just underneath the surface of American society. The alleged shooter, Colt Gray, only 14 years old, brought a semi-automatic weapon to school on his second day at Apalachee High School, where he was just starting as a freshman.

The victims were two other 14-year-old students, Mason Schermerhorn and Christian Angulo, and two math teachers, Richard Aspinwall, 39, who was also an assistant football coach, and Christina Irimie, 53, a Romanian immigrant who moved to the US in the 1990s. Seven other students and two teachers were wounded, but their injuries are not life-threatening.

On Thursday evening, only hours before his son was to be arraigned on four counts of felony murder—for which the 14-year-old will be tried as an adult—Colin Gray, the 54-year-old father, was arrested and charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter, two counts of second-degree murder and eight counts of cruelty to children.

His arrest came after Gray reportedly told the Georgia Bureau of Investigation that he had purchased the AR-15-type semi-automatic rifle used at the high school and given it to his son as a Christmas present last December.

Police had visited Colin and Colt Gray at their home in May 2023 in response to anonymous tips to the FBI that a student at the school Colt was then attending, Jefferson Middle School, was threatening an armed attack. Colt was living with his father after his recent divorce from the boy's mother.

The threats posted on social media had been traced to an account opened by Colt Gray, but he claimed to have closed the account because it had been hacked and

denied he had made the threats. His father told police that Colt did not have “unsupervised” access to the hunting rifles he possessed.

Coming only two months before the US presidential election, the massacre in Georgia has become fodder for both major capitalist parties, which went through the motions of deploring the loss of life, while combining sanctimony with their standard political rhetoric.

Contrary to the fascistic anti-immigrant propaganda spread by Donald Trump, it was not an “illegal alien” who carried out the murders at Apalachee High. It was a 14-year-old child born in Georgia. Trump denounced the boy as “a sick and deranged monster.” Perhaps he was looking in the mirror. But that description no more explains the terrible event in Georgia than it does the danger posed by Trump's fascistic bid for power.

As for the Democrats, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris trundled out the time-worn prayers and appeals to curb the availability of semi-automatic weapons. Harris said, “We’ve got to stop it. It doesn’t have to be this way.” In other settings, she has declared that school shootings are “not what this country is about.”

But there is nothing more “American” than a massacre of students and teachers with a firearm. There have been 416 such attacks over the past 25 years, according to a database maintained by the *Washington Post*, going back to the Columbine High School mass killings in Littleton, Colorado.

Five presidents have held office since then—Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump and Biden—three Democrats and two Republicans. In that 25-year span, Republicans have controlled Congress for 11 years, Democrats for six, and control has been divided for eight. School shootings have risen steadily throughout this period.

Each of these tragedies have unique features of their

own, of course. Colt Gray is the youngest person ever charged with multiple homicides in a school shooting. He was clearly not targeting anyone in particular, since it was only his second day in a new school. For the same reason, he was evidently not reacting to bullying or other mistreatment. His aunt told the press he had been struggling with mental health issues.

But what is most decisive is not the particular features of such events, but what they have in common. They are all the product of a society in an advanced state of disintegration, with the widest gap in human history between the wealth of those at the top and the day-to-day struggle for existence among the vast majority who produce that wealth.

The most horrific expression of that social crisis is the turn by American imperialism to world war, to maintain its global dominance despite its economic decline. Children like Colt Gray have lived all their lives with America engaged in war. Violence is the number one activity of the US government abroad and one of the main activities of state and local governments at home. More than 1,000 people a year are killed by police. And on top of that, Colt Gray and others of his generation have seen nearly 1.5 million Americans killed by a preventable virus in a pandemic which the ruling class refused to fight because it would hurt their profits.

Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris declared, “We must end the epidemic of gun violence in our country once and for all.” But America is the number one promoter and perpetrator of “gun violence” throughout the world, from the export of weapons to the waging of war in all its forms. While Harris deplores “gun violence” in a Georgia high school, she enthusiastically embraces far worse violence in the schools of Gaza, where tens of thousands have been slaughtered.

Joseph Kishore, the Socialist Equality Party candidate for president, called attention to the underlying social and political factors behind the epidemic of school shootings in a statement published Wednesday. In addition to the endless and expanding war, he noted, “The normalization of mass death in the pandemic has been a defining experience for young people, with more than 1.4 million deaths in the US alone due to the willful rejection of basic public health by the American ruling class.

“The political system is in an advanced state of degeneration,” Kishore stated, “with one of the parties of the ruling class, the Republicans, led by a fascistic demagogue, and the other, the Democrats, focused entirely on the escalation of war. The entire official political climate and culture wallows in muck and filth, centered on the glorification of wealth, amidst deepening economic and social crisis for the broad mass of the population.”

There will be no end to school massacres under either a Democratic or a Republican administration. It is only when the working class takes up an independent political struggle against the root cause of all violence and oppression, capitalism and the nation-state system, that such expressions of social pathology can be abolished.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact