

# *The Utopian*

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## Discussion and debate

# *March for Our Lives!*

## An Assessment of a Movement



This issue of the *Utopian Bulletin* continues a discussion that began last month over issues related to gun violence and gun control, and includes in this issue a discussion of the nature and significance of the *March for Our Lives* protests.

March 23  
All,

Attached is a survey of thousands of students nationwide on their views related to gun policy. You may find it interesting. ([Newsela](#))

I have listened to many interviews with students. Some say they want 'something done.' Some express support for 'gun control laws.' Many (surprisingly many, in my mind) express more sophisticated views, indicating awareness of how many guns are out there (and thereby questioning 'gun control'), express concern over restriction to people's right to guns and, often, making overt

statements that this is not their goal, sometimes even suggesting that 'deeper solutions' (usually not well articulated) are needed. I plan to go to the Santa Fe demonstration tomorrow to see if I can gain further impressions of this movement. I have strong bias toward a positive orientation to a student movement. No other people (in my experience) are more open to leaps in consciousness, more committed to meaningful aims (vs. self-interest), and more capable of capturing center stage. We will see what emerges.

Rod

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March 24  
All,

The Newsela survey is indeed interesting. Also, I like the idea of going to the local demonstration. As to the one in D.C., I neither oppose nor endorse it. On one hand it smells too corporate, electoral and anti-gun. While 'March for Our Lives' and 'Never Again' are slogans with which just about anyone can agree, behind them is



a program, many points of which I disagree. For example, some of the sections of the Parkland Manifesto (<https://portside.org/2018-03-23/parkland-students-our-manifesto>) call for state controls that will infringe on the rights and ability of a lot of people to defend themselves; and in the end they still won't be a solution to the problem of mass shootings. Nevertheless, I believe that to many young people, 'March for Our Lives' means a lot more than their school safety, but also the prospect of jobs, college costs, student debt, war, racism and sexism, a general precarious existence post-graduation, and especially, grownup politicians who ignore them.

I'm sure these latter issues were a concern both of those who walked out last week and those who stayed in. From what I've read, those who remained had good reasons to do so. Those who walked out seem to be a more of a mixed bag. Some focused solely on guns rather than the people who misuse them. On the other hand, Empower, the youth wing of the Women's March that coordinated the walkout, put out a statement that read in part, 'It is important that when we refer to gun violence, we do not overlook the impact of police brutality and militarized policing, or see police in schools as a solution. We also recognize the United States has exported gun violence through imperialist foreign policy to destabilize other nations...' In Atlanta, students took knees. In Baltimore and Chicago many who walked out called for anti-poverty and mental health programs, and in Nashville students pulled down a U.S. flag and stomped on it.

In my earlier post I referred to a 'gun culture'. I agree with others that I used it too broadly, throwing in hunters, collectors, re-enactors and those concerned with their self-defense together with the frantic leadership of the NRA. That group took over the organization in the mid-70's, I believe as part of the general reaction to the gains made Black and brown people, women, and the LGBTQ movement in the decade before. However, the NRA wasn't always the rabid group it is now. Robert Leonard alludes to this in his Op-Ed piece in the *Times* when he recalls the NRA as 'a group primarily known for teaching gun appreciation and safety rather than lobbying'.

Nevertheless, I still have questions: Why are there so many mass shootings in the U.S.? Why are the overwhelming majority of the shooters men of European ancestry? I don't believe it's a question of too many guns. Switzerland, for one, has more guns (including fully automatic ones) per capita than the U.S., and one doesn't hear about massacres there. Rather I think there is a fear, going back to the origins of the country, of both those who were here originally and of slave revolts. I believe the 'well-regulated militia' of the Second Amendment wasn't only a right (and defense) recognized by the new state in reaction to Shay's Rebellion, but also a 'defense' against the righteous anger of indigenous peoples.

Peace,  
Bill

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March 25

All,

There is much that Bill says that I agree with.

I would not describe my own attitude to yesterday's student-organized and -led demonstrations (in DC and elsewhere) as Bill does, that is, as something I 'neither oppose nor endorse.' I think the demonstrations were a positive development (how positive remains to be seen). I would have been happy to see them be twice as large, and to have taken place in 1,600 rather than 800 cities. If friends of the Utopian had participated in them--to increase their size, but more importantly to get a sense of attitudes and outlooks, and perhaps chat with some folks, I would feel positively about this as well. So, I am not indifferent or 'neutral' about what took place; I welcome it. Neither opposing nor endorsing does not convey my attitude.



Bill is right that "March for Our Lives" and "Never Again" are broad slogans, without much substance on their own. He is also right that there is content we would agree with and content that we would disagree with filling the empty space. (The same can be said about phrases such as "Black Lives Matter," "Peace Now," or "Freedom").

In listening to many speeches and watching much coverage, I observed many positives. I agree with Bill that beyond school safety, there was a strong presence of issues such as "jobs, college costs, student debt, war, racism and sexism, a general precarious existence post-graduation, and especially, grownup politicians who

ignore them." There were many expressions that cannot be captured in a single phrase or slogan that expressed a desire for *deep and meaningful change of 'what is'* and a rejection of *token and/or false promises*. That is, there was a great deal of fluidity behind the unofficial march slogan--*change*. I also noticed the following, which I see as openings (even if small) to positive evolution down the road: 1) Although it was not universal, there was frequent use of the words 'gun reform,' rather than 'gun control.' I think this was a conscious choice of words that rejected aspects of traditional liberal gun control politics; 2) The platform (in DC at least) was not turned over to Democratic Party politicians (though I may have missed something here); in fact, there was little if any reference to either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. I think these two things taken together suggest that the students managed to maintain a more significant degree of *independence* than most movements we have seen over the past decade (or more). Put another way, if a mythical grandson of John Lewis had spoken from the platform, I do not think his speech would have been censored (as happened in 1963) to avoid offending politicians; 3) The makeup of the crowd, as far as I could see, was extremely racially, gender and class inclusive--and the outlook this represents was often consciously expressed.



All that said, there is no question that the underlying (and often explicit) agenda of the March was electoral action--getting students registered to vote, getting students to actually vote, and then voting against candidates who are identified with the NRA and, presumably, for candidates who support some type of gun 'reform' or 'control.' Is this positive or negative? Well, it depends how you look at it. I would love it if a whole generation of youth became politically conscious and, in one fell swoop, radicalized to a degree that would reject electoral politics, the two capitalist parties and

reformism in general. In the current political climate, I think it is safe to say that while a few might do this, the overwhelming majority will not. Such a radicalization will occur, if it does occur, in part and of perhaps of necessity because students who are deeply committed to 'real change' will need to have their illusions in their own 'next step' shattered. I cannot say whether substantial numbers of students will hold on to a desire for *real change*, but I can predict that electoral action, specifically support for liberal/progressive (mostly Democratic Party) politicians will not give it to them.



It would be a serious error to see the above statements as 'next-step-to-the-left politics.' I am not advocating that we tell students that they should register to vote, and then vote against anti-NRA politicians and for pro-gun reform politicians. I am simply noting that in present circumstances this is their most likely path to breaking their illusions and gaining an alternative, more radical outlook. I advocate that we patiently explain to the few people we can talk to (and to the even fewer people who will listen) that: 1) single-issue gun reform is not a solution; 2) that 'gun control' in general is not only not a solution, but also a danger; and most importantly; 3) that deep change in the *connected* ills of society can only be addressed by a radical mass movement that takes militant action that is independent of, and is in fact over and against politicians and parties, and which consciously forges alliances in practice and in programmatic expression with all those exploited and oppressed by the present system. I think if there were a thousand of us, we could picture doing this in some way that would make some difference. I think that a 'we neither oppose or endorse' your movement (*movement, not this or that slogan*) would be a hindrance to having a positive impact.



I think the phrase 'culture of violence,' while less than perfect, is a bridging phrase to those (rightfully) concerned about the level of gun violence that exists, not just in the form of school shootings, but also in every day life. Our society does have extreme violence in many forms. This does not stem from people who own, enjoy, and use guns for hunting, target practice or just the pleasure of shooting (things, not people). I agree with Bill that the words 'gun culture' seriously misstates the issue (suggesting that enjoyment of guns is the problem when it is not). 'Culture of violence' does not convey where the culture comes from, who stands behind it, who profits from it, etc. To the degree that it places 'blame' without reference to wealth and power, it is less than ideal. Again, I think it is a 'bridging' phrase.

Rod

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March 25

All,

Here is my take on the gun control movement (I call it that because, in my experience, that is how it self-identifies).

1. As far as I can tell, it is not an oppositional movement. Rather, it is calling on the state to strengthen regulation of firearms. It hopes to accomplish this via electoral means -- by voting for candidates who support gun control and against those who oppose it. This strategy fits hand in glove with the approach of the mainstream of Democrats -- including and perhaps especially the globalizers (neoliberals) who generally advocate social liberalism, so long as they can promote U.S. global dominance via "the free market" (and the various associated imperialist means for promoting and enforcing such.)

2. In this regard, it is no surprise that neoliberal billionaires (Eli Broad, Tom Steyer, and (I think) Warren Buffet, among others) support and fund these marches and this movement. Or that key labor bureaucrats -- especially those who head the national teacher unions, AFT president Randi Weingarten and NEA president Lily Eskelsen Garcia, enthusiastically promote it to their members. Nor is it surprising that the gun control cause has extensive support from a wide network of NGOs and non-profiters. Nonprofiters and labor bureaucrats have for some time been key -- maybe the key --

mechanisms for herding opposition movements and oppositionists back into the system and then helping to corral and contain them. This was the case with Occupy, for example: Occupy was a huge oppositional movement when it erupted in the late summer of 2011 (in New York) and the early fall of 2011 in Oakland and elsewhere - - in Oakland we shut down the Port of Oakland multiple times (once with over 30,000 marching several miles to the Port), and for weeks held nightly mass meetings attended by a thousand or more. That was an oppositional movement, and it was herded, corralled and contained by the assiduous effort of the local labor leadership and the NGOs, who at first just provided material support (meeting rooms, port a-potties, sound systems, etc.) but over time stressed the need to work through the Democrats, help re-elect Democrats, etc. And please note: Occupy was at least initially an oppositional movement -- anti-capitalist and, for a large section, anti-statist.



The gun control movement is not now oppositional. The nonprofiteers don't have to herd it back into the system -- they just have to urge it to continue on its path of focusing on electoral means, calling for state regulation (de facto strengthening the state), and relying on "well-intentioned" Democrats. Democrats didn't have to speak at yesterday's rallies -- the movement is already supporting them, all out and vigorously.

3. Is this really a multi-racial movement that cuts fairly evenly across class / income divides? That doesn't seem to be the case here in the San Francisco Bay Area. I didn't attend yesterday's San Francisco march, but I have spoken at length to friends who did. They report that there were very few black people among the marchers, including hardly any inner city black youth. This

corresponds to what I have found sentiment to be in Oakland -- I taught for several years at Castlemont High in East Oakland, an area known as "Murder Alley". The activists among those former students that I am still in contact with aren't into gun control, but they are passionate about one form of gun violence: murder of young black men by the cops.

4. A few nights ago, the Sacramento Kings NBA game was shut down by a large number of militant protesters, in response to the murder of a young black man, Stephon Clark, by Sacramento cops. This reminded me that, prior to the gun control issue bursting into prominence, there had been national outrage and an incipient movement against cop murders -- especially the murder of young black men, but also the murder of others (e.g., Sandra Bland, a young black woman). The cops will not stop murdering black people. And protests against these murders will resume. How will the gun control advocates relate to this? I fear that many will become more reliant on cops to protect them (because, gun control or not, gangs etc. will continue to have guns). In any event, I am for raising relevant demands. Here are a few that come to mind.



1. Demilitarization of the police -- confiscate the tanks, armored personnel carriers, listening / spying devices, and Star Wars storm trooper gear that the US Dept of Defense and Homeland Security have dispensed to cops across the country.

2. Education on the role of the police as an occupying army in high poverty minority communities -- especially, but not only, in black communities.

3. Cops off campus -- no guns on campus. (This has been a live demand in Oakland, where for the past few years some of us have

been calling for disbanding the Oakland Unified School District Police.)

4. Ban the use of "dum-dum" (hollow point) bullets, which expand and explode inside the victim's body. Dum-dum bullets are banned from military use by an international agreement dating back over 100 years. But almost all police forces use them -- including the Oakland PD and the Oakland school police.

In addition, I believe that we ought to begin to propagandize about the need for workplace and community defense guards; and that these will need to be armed (and why); and that this can't happen if we forfeit the right to bear arms.

Given the nature and consciousness of the gun control movement, I expect that it will be difficult to raise these to the movement as a whole today. They can be raised to individuals, perhaps at times to a small group, etc. If / when the movement against police murders takes off again -- as I think that it will -- more may and hopefully will be possible.

Jack

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March 26  
Everybody,

While I can appreciate Rod's enthusiasm for the student-led movement against gun violence, I do not share it. In fact, I am very disturbed at the tremendous political momentum it has given to the liberals' drive to disarm the US population.

As Jack has pointed out, the movement is, in fact, a movement in favor of more gun control, that is, a movement to further restrict our rights to own and to know how to use weapons. I don't see how one can slice this any other way. This is why the movement was not only favorably covered, but also aggressively promoted and actively organized, by the liberal media. For example, CNN gave the movement's leaders a very generous forum during prime time, and the rest of the liberal media consistently boosted the movement and described its leaders as young heroes coming to rescue the country from its fanatical devotion to "gun culture." (By way of comparison, it is worth remembering how difficult it was to get any

media coverage, let alone favorable coverage, during the early stages of either the movement for nuclear disarmament or the movement against the war in Vietnam. And when the movements did get coverage, the messages of both movements were grossly distorted and the movements red-baited.)



The media attention is only one example of the fact that the movement lacked any kind of oppositional, let alone radical, thrust. Aside from the media, the movement was fully supported by the students' parents, their teachers and the teachers' unions, their school administrators, the Democratic Party, and some of the wealthiest liberals (remember them, the capitalists?) in the country. (Beyond the figures Jack mentioned, not the least important is former NY mayor and billionaire Michael Bloomberg, who has been very aggressive in promoting his pro gun control position.) I would feel somewhat better about the movement had any of its leaders seen fit to criticize the long-running wars the country has been engaged in, to indicate their concerns about the threats to attack North Korea and Iran, to question the glorification, on the part of the politicians and the mass media, of all things military, and even to hint that the "defense" budget be pared (instead of being drastically increased) to pay for intervention programs that might actually prevent disturbed and alienated young men from engaging in mass shootings and other forms of violence. If any of the movements' spokespersons mentioned any of this, I didn't notice it. In many ways, the current movement of high school students parallels much of the movement on the college campuses, where "radical" students have demanded that the campus authorities ban "extremist" speakers, provide "safe spaces",

protect everyone from "micro-aggressions," and enforce elaborate behavior codes that outlaws any speech that anyone at any time might find offensive. Whereas the student movement of the 1960s fought to get rid of "in loco parentis", the current movements seem to be demanding that the state, teachers, school administrators, and the police act as their surrogate parents.

(By the way, I can see several reasons why the Democratic politicians didn't dominate the speakers' platforms at the marches, let alone censor any of the speeches: (1) They didn't need to try to co-opt the movement, because the movement has already been completely co-opted; (2) They wanted to give the impression that the movement is nothing but a spontaneous grass-roots uprising of young people; 3. They didn't and don't want to hurt the chances of Democrats running for congress in conservative states and congressional districts who, for the purposes of getting elected, might wish to take positions in favor of gun rights or at least fudge the question.)



In fact, I am very fearful about the future of gun rights in this country, and I am particularly disturbed that the issue has been carved out along liberal vs. conservative lines. Not only has the current movement put significant wind in the sails of the gun control liberals, it has also facilitated calls for the outright repeal of the Second Amendment. Should such a movement build up any

steam, I will be standing with those organizing to defend our gun rights, even if that means marching alongside the NRA!

I don't see how anybody who calls him/herself a revolutionary can look at the current climate on gun control and the mass movement building behind it with anything but trepidation. I certainly hope I am wrong and that, as Rod suggests, the current student movement has radical potential, but I don't see it. Instead, it looks like one more piece of the mass liberal and pro-state "resistance" that is lining up squarely behind the Democratic Party and which, at least for the foreseeable future, is likely to swamp anything more radical that might develop. And I would not be surprised if many of the leaders of the current movement wind up, following the trajectories of Bill and Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, as future leaders of the Democratic Party. ("Emma Gonzalez for President" anyone?)

Ron

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March 26  
HI Everyone,

Here's my question...if we were an organization with a presence trying to be active, would we just ignore these grammar and high school students? Or, would we try to put forward our point of view on gun control. We could point to Ferguson and all the other murders by police on young Black people. Would we point out in Chicago that hand guns are illegal and that the murder rate there is the worst in the country (questioning the value of gun control as a solution.) We could counter the politicians who have no program to make the schools safe or even to supply students with a decent education in major cities. Sally watched coverage of DC and there was a heavy minority representation and a verbal acknowledgement by the Parkland kids that there are some youth that daily experience shootings.

Rod did put out the survey that said that about 25% of the kids disagreed with gun control.

In other words, how could we just ignore young people out in the streets despite all of the liberals and the media?

Roni

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March 26  
All,

I disagree with Jack and Ron's views (most strongly with Ron's). I have previously commented on Bill's. I am in solidarity with Roni's views about searching for a way to relate to this (possibly) growing and (even more remotely possible) radicalizing movement.



It is fair to say, as Jack does, that 'gun control' was a presumed message of the demonstrations (I am most familiar with the DC demonstration, which I watched in its entirety on multiple channels). I note (again): 1) the official slogans were: 'March for Our Lives' and 'Never Again.' 'Gun control' was not a slogan. As Bill wrote, the official slogans are vague, and widely varying content can be injected into them. Jack refers to Saturday's protests as the gun control movement because 'this is how the movement self-identifies.' While I accept that gun control was the dominant injected content, it was not the official slogan of the March. Moreover, 'gun reform' were the words used by many speakers and seen on many signs and banners. (Although I can't prove it, I don't think this was a devious attempt to advance a 'hidden agenda'). Based on what I saw and heard, these words were/are being used consciously because a significant a significant number of people participating the protests think that 'gun control' implies an agenda that they do not support. We will see whether this distinction takes on more or less importance in the weeks ahead; 2) I heard



repeated anti-racist references, repeated anti-sexists references, repeated affirmations of LGBT identity and rights. I heard calls for arming teachers--with pens, pencils, decent salaries and money for education. I saw, as Sally noted via Roni's email, a racially and sexually diverse crowd that repeatedly raised the daily violence of life in America, with strong emphasis on the gun violence, which takes place in major cities. I heard a student in my class this morning say, 'its hard to know what to do next--we certainly can't call on the cops--they will shoot us when they arrive.'" I heard repeated denunciations of 'politicians and their lies.' I heard denunciations of the role of special interest groups (yes, the NRA in particular).



There is no question that a liberal/reformist outlook can easily accommodate these views. (Just as there is no question that a liberal/reformist outlook can accommodate any of the views dominant in the January Women's March.) There is no doubt that virtually all movements of any size/scope whatsoever in this country at this time can be characterized as being liberal/reformist/statist or rightist/statist.

Ron writes that he is "very disturbed at the tremendous political momentum it (the student movement--RM) has given to the liberals' drive to disarm the US population." With these words, the newly formed student movement, with its diversity and contradictions, is turned into a driver of a liberals drive to disarm the population. Gun violence in schools is real. (It is true that the drama of school shootings exceeds the statistical incidence--yes, more people probably fall off of ladders--but that doesn't change the fact that it is a significant trauma to young people of all races, sexes and backgrounds.) Gun violence in America is real, horrifically

real. It is but a small step from there to the fact that police violence is real. Mass incarceration is real. (And, as Ron correctly points out, war--not abstract war, but war with an agenda--is real.) But Ron focuses on what the students didn't raise, and casts them as drivers of the liberal effort to disarm the population. I don't doubt that liberals would like to disarm the population. I don't doubt that the Marxist left and extreme right would do the same thing, each in their own unique ways. But where, exactly is the current liberal drive to disarm the population? Legislation? (Name the bill.) Rallies and marches? (Calling the 'March for Our Lives/Never Again' a drive to disarm the population doesn't make it so.) Where is the *dynamic* that would permit liberals to impose on a fiercely pro-Second Amendment population their own disarmament? To get to where Ron is at on this, we have to do two things: 1) Argue that any reform of *any type* regarding gun ownership and use is nothing but a first, pernicious step on the road to disarmament of the population. This is the position of the NRA. (Why not let my 18-year-old students come to school with gun; after all, their dads can bring them to bars?); or, 2) Move to abstractions and theoretical possibilities. When Ron examines the abstractions and theoretical possibilities, the one place is he sure he wants to be is marching alongside the NRA in defense of an Amendment to the US Constitution. ("I am very fearful about the future of gun rights in this country, and I am particularly disturbed that the issue has been carved out along liberal vs. conservative lines. Not only has the current movement put significant wind in the sails of the gun control liberals, it has also facilitated calls for the outright repeal of the Second Amendment. Should such a movement build up any steam, I will be standing with those organizing to defend our gun rights, even if that means marching alongside the NRA!") Really???

Ron writes: "Whereas the student movement of the 1960s fought to get rid of "in loco parentis", the current movements seem to be demanding that the state, teachers, school administrators, and the police act as their surrogate parents." True. True of almost everything we see around us.

Identifying, much less predicting, the factors that might tip things from liberalism (or conservatism) to radicalism (and what might happen then), is difficult, if not impossible. My view is *not* that this new student movement will radicalize. Almost *nothing* in the period we are in radicalizes (at least on the surface, as we perceive it);

I would be crazy to think that it is *likely* that this particular movement would be an exception. Rather, I choose to think it is possible. In the concrete, I will march with the students, and I won't march with the NRA. I would very much like to hear what choice, if any, friends of the Utopian would make on this question.

Rod

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March 26

All,

I am ambivalent about this anti-gun violence movement. It is not the movement I would have chosen, if I were in charge of such things. It is not simply reactionary (like the anti-choice movement) nor is it simply progressive (such as Black Lives Matter). Of course it is dominated by liberal and Democratic Party politics, but so was the Civil Rights movement, the unionization drive of the 30s, etc.



What else could it be? Many of the youth are supporting the sort of minimal demands that Ron previously wrote he could accept as a united front sort of program, such as expanded waiting periods, background checks for buyers, increased age limits, denial of guns to men who threaten their wives, etc. Polls show that most gun owners accept such demands, as do even most rank-and-file NRA members. They do not imply disarming the population. Perhaps this is what "gun reform" means? (That these demands, if implemented probably would not do too much to improve things is a different issue.) *And the movement is in fact oppositional.* The young people are aware that the government, at all levels, has refused to implement even these minimal reforms. The issue exposes how undemocratic the government really is! The Republicans are totally controlled by the NRA and its bankrollers.

The Democrats capitulate to them. The young people see themselves as challenging the whole political establishment, even if, in fact, the liberals are working hard to channel them into the Democrats. I don't know what program I would raise if I were "intervening" in the movement--at least in part raising the issue of the lack of democracy in this government which cannot pass laws which are overwhelming popular due to special interests and big money.

Just some thoughts.

Wayne

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March 26

Everyone,

I disagree with Jack's view, and now Ron's, that these marches were only for a pre-set liberal agenda, entirely co-opted, and not oppositional at all, and share Bill and Rod's view (and I think Rod's reiterated view plus Wayne's--I have just seen these posts) that they were mixed, with oppositional potential. The reason is not that I favor enacting gun control laws--I don't--but that (1) as I've said before, I believe mass shootings and other gun violence is a large social issue that we need to address in its own right, and (2) I think we should do so by trying to describe a non-statist approach to curbing gun violence.

I appreciate both Bill's and Rod's comments. My impression viewing these events indirectly, not on the ground, is still very positive toward the general self-mobilization of young people that is going on. I have a couple of thoughts to throw into what I hope is an opening discussion:

\*The issue of violence in schools shouldn't be left on the side while seeking agreement on other areas. It's a huge issue and a life-quality one. School-age youth are legally required to be in school; OK, they are humanly entitled to be safe there. How to accomplish that is another issue and I think everyone in our grouping is agreed that it shouldn't be by legislation to ban or restrict ownership of all firearms. Saying that should be the start of some effort to say how it could be accomplished.

\* The violence issue doesn't just involve schools, though that was the driving force here. There's also a huge issue of street violence, gunshots being a common nighttime street occurrence in some areas, especially "inner city" (Black) areas, people being randomly (and grievously--4 body shots) wounded by people they don't even know who are shooting at someone else or just shooting, etc. It should be clear that this is a real issue along with that of police violence (and, in fact, a source of some pro-police views among Black people). Here too what to do about the issue is another matter.

\* We need to think in terms of, and pose the question as: finding non-statist ways to reduce/deter gun violence in schools and elsewhere. I don't know exactly what these are except that they involve changing the culture. I think, in fact, that that is in part what the demonstrations were doing, more significantly than the marchers' particular agendas. That is, although largely aimed at the fall elections and pressuring congress, etc., the demonstrations were also about changing a culture, trying to make it politically and humanly impossible to go on without some change.

That same point is also what we would want to stress to most mass movements--the real victories will come by keeping the movement mobilized and growing, not through legislation good or bad, and the movement should be seeking a shift in the culture. As I've said, I don't know exactly what this means in terms of specifics, and these remarks may be overly general. But I hope others can at least take up the question of what a non-statist program against gun violence might be.

Chris

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March 26  
Everybody,

Thanks to everyone for their thoughts on the issue of the recent march, gun control, etc.

I. I am not proposing that we not intervene in the current movement. I am merely presenting my analysis (including my gut reaction) to the recent march and to the events surrounding it.

II. I am for everybody who wants to intervene in the movement to do so, and to do so on whatever political and/or organizational basis they choose to do so.

III. I know that Rod attended the demonstration in Santa Fe. I would like to know if anyone else in our milieu participated in any of the demonstrations in their locale? If they did attend, I would like to hear their impressions. If they didn't, I would like to know why. Speaking personally, I did not feel motivated to attend the demonstration in LA. (I did attend the "Women's March" in Los Angeles a year ago January, but did not feel motivated to attend this one. I do not think it is just because I am one year and two months older than I was in January 2017.)

IV. In answer to Roni's question, if we did constitute an organization, I would have suggested that people go to the demonstrations and hand out a very maximal leaflet that said something like:

- 1) School shootings and gun violence (including from the police) are bad.
- 2) The source of them and therefore the real problem is not guns but the fucked up society we live in, which is based on power, domination, material success, and violence; which allows a few people to live in obscene opulence, a few more to live in some level of comfort, and the majority to struggle merely to survive; and which is run by a handful of rich people through the two parties (Democrats and the Republicans) they control.
- 3) The solution is to fight to get rid of the current system and replace it with another one, one based real equality (no rich, no poor), democracy, and cooperation, in which all the people rule as equals. We think that, if we really wanted to, we can do better than the elite
- 4) To do this will require a revolution, the rapid overthrow of the current system and replacement with a new one.
- 5) While we would like this revolution to be as majoritarian and as non-violent as possible, we recognize that, given the fact

that the elite has the military and police for at its disposal. We might need to arm ourselves to defend ourselves and our movement.

- 6) If we recognize that, at some point in the future, we might need to use arms to defend ourselves, then we should not be demanding that the state increase its ability to prevent people from getting guns. We should be looking for other ways to defend our workplace, schools, and communities, such as....

V. If we did distribute such a leaflet at the recent demonstrations, I seriously wonder where it would have been best received, the majority who are marching for more and better gun control or the minority of counter-protesters who are out defending gun rights?



VI. In the past few weeks, several articles have appeared in the liberal media that have called for the repeal of the Second Amendment. I have no idea whether this has any serious support in the liberal elite or not (although I suspect it does), but, to repeat, if such a movement (to repeal the Second Amendment) were to emerge and pick up steam, I would be willing to march with the NRA and other gun rights organizations to oppose this.

Ron

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March 26  
All,

I am in agreement with Ron's comments I-IV and, subsequently, 1-5. These comments are distinctly different than the way I interpreted his previous comments, but that is neither here nor there. Ron's comment 6: Before commenting, I ask Ron to clarify

whether ANY measure—background checks, banning guns in schools or bars, limiting the personal ownership of machine guns and bazookas—constitutes ‘the state increasing its ability to prevent people from getting guns’?

Ron’s comment V: Ron writes that he ‘wonders where it (a leaflet such as he describes) would have been best received, the majority who are marching for more and better gun control or the minority of counter-protesters who are out defending gun rights?’ It’s a fair question. It has no provable answer that I know of. It is a question that might likely change, over time, one way or the other. That said, I would warn against the danger of romanticizing those who are fighting for gun rights in the form of the counter-protests Ron is referring to. And I would join Ron is pointing to the limitations—and dangers—of liberalism generally, and the liberal elite particularly.

Ron’s comment VI: Ron says that he would march with NRA to defend the Second Amendment. I think there would be alternative and better approaches to the hypothetical scenario he describes. I will think about them, and urge others to do so as well.

Rod

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March 27

This is a rich discussion. I appreciate it a lot.

I am trying to get a sense of this movement. Something this big will probably have tendencies in it.

Here is one: [https://youtu.be/H-q\\_KPPyPjg](https://youtu.be/H-q_KPPyPjg)  
Shemon

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March 27

Hi All,

First, I want to be clear: I haven't changed my views from what I posted a couple of days ago. Nor, as far as I can tell from reading this thread, has Ron changed his view (just to make sure, I've spoken to Ron before and after his posts). And I agree with both of Ron's substantive posts (with the possible exception of Ron's



comment about "marching with the NRA", which needs clarification -- more later). As I read Ron's second post, he took a "united front" approach to others about the gun control movement, continuing to express skepticism about the receptiveness of a significant section of this movement to our approach, but saying that those who think that there is such a possibility could (indeed, should) try to intervene to see if that's so. That's where I'm at too -- in fact, I don't want to tell people what to do, but do want to indicate what my thoughts are about the gun control movement. However, I am surprised that there's thus far only been agreement with this "united front" post of Ron's. Do we all really agree? My guess is that there are still important open questions on which we don't agree. We should identify them, and then we can test them in practice. Here are a few:

1. Is the gun control movement an oppositional movement? (Ron and I say no; Wayne and Chris say yes. Rod agreed with "the main lines" of Wayne and Chris's posts, so may also agree.)
2. Are our views more likely to find receptivity in sections (perhaps still in process of creation) of the gun control movement, or among opponents of this movement? Or perhaps among both. Or (hopefully not) among neither.
3. What do we think about gun control? Are we for no new regulation; are we for some regulation (e.g., of automatic weapons; of "bump stocks" and other means of turning semi-automatic weapons (which only fire one shot at a time) into near-automatic weapons (by enabling them to fire nearly continuously)? Are we for more stringent regulation? Are we for restrictions on who can be licensed? And if we are for any of these, how do we prevent them from being used the way that state regulations are usually (although, admittedly, not always) used -- against those least able to defend themselves and most vulnerable.
4. More generally: How do we counter the strong tendency in this movement to look to electoral means -- and in particular to electing "sympathetic" Democratic Party politicians -- to implement regulations. (And how does this correspond to our attitude towards other areas -- for example, to the dominant wing of the environmental movement, which wants to strengthen state

regulation; to the "progressives" who look to Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and others to regulate Wall Street; etc.?)



Of course, these questions have to be answered dynamically: consciousness can change when people are in struggle, sometimes dramatically. Perhaps this will be the case here. Perhaps we will see significant sections move leftwards and come into conflict with the limits desired by the Democrats, the nonprofiteers / NGOs, the billionaire globalists, the labor leadership, and the state (these groups are of course not mutually exclusive). As far as I can tell, that is not where this movement is at now, and I think that it (or sections of it) will have to go well beyond its current location and direction. Although I don't think that this is likely, I don't rule it out, and absent other targets, I think that folks with the energy to do so should see if they can organize around this issue.

In that regard, I'm interested to know what results people who see promise in this movement have had thus far. I have tried to find a way in, admittedly constrained by my age and flagging energy, but I confess that thus far I haven't found a way in. Not in the high school where I'm teaching this spring. Not in the high school in "Deep East" Oakland where I taught for years, nor among my former students there with whom I'm still in touch (including activists -- e.g., one is close to Colin Kaepernick). I spoke at length with one of the most prominent and best activists in Sonoma County (50 miles north of San Francisco), a guy in his mid-forties who used to be a leading youth activist and has maintained connections with young radicals and revolutionaries in his area. I've known him for decades. He told me that he's given up on trying to influence the gun control movement in his area because he can't

find anyone who will engage in a real dialogue with him (he's against regulations because he thinks that they will strengthen the state at the expense of the most vulnerable).

Maybe others have had better luck. Please elaborate. (For what it's worth, I'm going to take another shot on Friday -- there's going to be a debate on gun control at lunchtime in the school where I teach. Maybe I'll be surprised by what I find. I hope so.)

A word now on the video posted by Shemon. I guess that I didn't see what so many others have seen. What I saw was a young black man saying that gun violence won't end until we get better schools, housing, etc. -- and putting the blame on Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner (a Republican so egregious he's like a pantomime villain) and other unidentified "politicians." In Chicago, this is not new and fresh. It is the line of an army of NGOs / nonprofits, who for many years have recruited and groomed cadre from minority communities. I have heard many talks like this one. In fact, I used to hear them regularly in Oakland, where groups like "Youth Together" and "Californians for Justice" would speak identically -- and play the role of building support for Democratic Party politicians. (Here's an example from Chicago: the nonprofits actively supported the Chicago Teachers Union 7-school-day strike in September 2012 -- for the first week -- and then pressured the union to settle. They (and the CTU leadership) now field candidates in the Democratic Party primaries, targeting Bruce Rauner and also the Rahm Emmanuel Democrats, putting themselves forward as fresh faces. So ... maybe the young man in the video forwarded by Shemon is much better than that. I hope so. But I think that my skepticism is understandable. Anyway, most of all we need to see for ourselves -- if folks think that there's an opening here, I think that it should be pursued and I'd like to hear what transpires.

In my previous posting, I suggested that we consider focusing on the police murder of minorities and young people (especially of young black males). As I said then, such police murder will not cease, and militant responses to it will resume. I will repeat that I think that we should call for demilitarization of the police; we should call for cops OUT of the schools (no guns in school), rather than more cops (and armed teachers).



I also think that we should stress that U.S. imperialism -- especially the U.S. military and the cops -- are the biggest single contributor to the culture of violence, here and around the world. I don't think that the gun control movement has been raising this. We should urge calling for the closing down of the 600-odd U.S. military bases around the world, withdrawing all troops from abroad, etc. And we should talk about what the U.S. war machine and the brutal cops have meant in real life terms. [For example: I have a friend who was a combat soldier in Vietnam. He fought in the front lines. He can't and won't discuss what transpired there, and even so his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be set off by sudden loud noises. Also, in the early 1990s, when I was at the U. of California San Francisco, I worked at the San Francisco VA Medical Center, in a small building that also housed encounter groups for veterans suffering from PTSD. I won't forget the screaming, violent threats, and at times violent actions of these poor folks -- used, abused, and thrown away by the U.S. war machine. Not to mention what's at the cause of their suffering -- the horrors that they were forced to inflict in Vietnam (and now in Iraq, Afghanistan, Niger, etc.)]

Finally: I am for defending the 2nd Amendment. Should it come to that, we may wind up aligned with the NRA. But I don't want to be identified with them -- any more than I want my opposition to Hillary Clinton to be identified with Steve Bannon's (or Breitbart's, or the Koch brothers, etc.). I don't know that Ron disagrees with this, but I do want to clarify my position.

Thanks for your time,  
Jack

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March 27

Hi All,

In order to talk to folks old, young, all races, gender and preferences, etc., we need to hear them in order to reach them. I work with young and not so young Black and Hispanic women who are higher paid clerks. (They make \$13 to \$18 an hour and most have either grown up kids and grand kids or younger teens to college-aged kids.) Most of them have had the same job for more than a few years as they support families who live in extended families.

They're for reforms like equal pay for equal work, free and quality health care, free and quality education, free abortion on demand, a decent retirement, good jobs with benefits like maternity leave, etc. Most of these reforms would have to be fought for and the state would have to provide them. Most support Black Lives Matter and some did not vote as Hillary disgusted them. Some did and regretted it. They know I'm an Anarchist and it matters little to them. A few went to the Women's demo but most are too busy with work and family to do much else.

My quandary about this discussion is that we have always in the past been in United Fronts for reforms, while being open about our politics. If we're not there how are people to hear us. And if we don't understand what they go through (us too as seniors) how in the hell are we to talk to them?

As for Gun Control we can say whenever the state and or the police have the power to control something it's the poor and working class that loses. We're certainly against gun violence. We know that some young people who are brutalized either at home or outside of it turn out to be mentally unstable and become brutes themselves. The solution is not controlling the guns but providing decent lives for every young person. We have to acknowledge that schools and home should be a safe place for youth. The capitalists can't provide that--ask and social worker!

Please forgive my rambling but I'm a bit confused as any reform fought for is a reform under capitalism and the capitalist state. And I can't imagine any working class person who's decent, doesn't want to make life better for those they care for. There must be

some way to relate to them and to these kids so that they're not swept up by the rotten left or the liberal politicians.

Roni

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March 28,  
Jack and all,

I said, "mixed" and meant, "mixed."

Chris

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March 28  
Chris,

Thanks for the correction. Sorry for the mix-up.

Jack

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March 28  
Everybody,

1. One of the problems I have with demands for "gun reform" and "more gun control" is that, as I understand them, the laws that already exist would prevent me and others like me from purchasing and/or legally owning a weapon. Should I really be demanding more laws and/or better enforcement of the existing ones? People are already prohibited from legally purchasing and owning a firearm if they have been convicted of either a felony or a misdemeanor involving violence. During my days as an activist, I was arrested five times and charged with at least two felonies and quite a few misdemeanors. If I remember correctly, all felonies were dropped as part of plea arrangements, but I have been convicted of several misdemeanors involving violence, among them, disorderly conduct and riot. How many others, activists in our and later generations, have such convictions on their records and are therefore already prohibited from legally owning weapons? How many of those in our milieu are already prohibited from legally owning weapons? Do you even know if you are already prohibited from buying and/or owning a weapon? Should we be demanding more and better-enforced laws, even as a tactic of engaging in a united front with the current movement? Should we really be

supporting well-intentioned but naïve demands for more and "better" gun control laws which those of us who have some experience recognize are extremely likely to be used against the best of the activists involved in the current movement at some time in the future?



2. In one of my posts, I asked how many of us, in addition to Rod, participated in last Saturday's demonstration, either in Washington or locally? If you did participate, I would like to learn your impressions? If you did not, I would be interested in hearing why.

3. As I've written, my strategic/tactical recommendation is that those who wish to support and participate in this movement should be free to do so, on whatever political and organizational basis they choose.

4. I hope that what people see as radical possibilities of this movement, in whole or in part, turn out to be true. However, as I've said before, I believe that from now until at least after the 2020 elections, we will be under tremendous pressure to cave in to the liberals, to mobilize behind "progressive" candidates, and to support, vote for, and even organize for the Democratic Party. I see the current movement in that context and as part of that trend. I believe it is likely that there are good, honest, militant, and potentially revolutionary people in the movement. I am for trying to reach them, if that is possible. I think the best way to do this is by presenting a very maximal analysis of contemporary capitalism and outlining our revolutionary perspective, no matter how farfetched it may seem at this point. I do not believe that

trying to "united front" the movement on the specific issue of gun control, as per "We support your demands and urge you to insist that the politicians adopt them and call on the state to enforce them," is the way to do this. (Frankly, if this isn't the "one-step to the left" method, I don't know what is.)

5. To put this in context. Gun violence kills somewhere around 15,000 people in the US annually. Less well known is the fact that over 100,000 people die of medical error every year. Where's the media coverage of and moral outrage over this?

Ron

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Jack, Ron, and All,

I agree with Jack that discussion of these issues should continue, and that the identification of issues we think most important along with identification of areas of agreement and disagreement, will help make this most fruitful. I appreciate the many comments thus far, and have found them all to be good food for thought. I am less sure that we should concern ourselves with whose position has changed or not changed or why. Events and discussion will, presumably, lead to deeper consideration, wherever that leads each individual. I accept, for example, that Ron, in his second email, is likely taking a 'united front' approach to the Utopian milieu as a whole. The second email was different than the first email in some ways. Is that because Ron's views changed? I have no idea. They may have, to one degree or another, or he may have chosen to say what was most important to him first, and to say other things second. I don't bring this up to examine the question, but rather to say that I don't think it is worth examining whether the views of others have changed or not.

Since Jack raised a question about my own position, I will address it in broad strokes (with more specifics to follow below): When I first commented on the marches, I perceived a 'new' movement, new in the sense that it was in many respects (though not all respects as various people have pointed out) a 'student movement.' It rapidly took on, for whatever set of reasons, a surprising (to me) mass character, dwarfing in size most of what we have seen over the past couple of decades. I saw young people as having a certain energy,



passion, open-mindedness and moral sensibility that, generally speaking, can increase the possibilities for radicalization. I saw representation from a broad cross-section of society, I heard anger at the status quo, I heard the status quo challenged in ways that went beyond the issue of gun policy--that is, issues of social justice were raised in various forms (race, sex, money, political corruptness). I noted that the official slogans of the demonstrations were, 'March for Our Lives,' and 'Never Again'--not 'Gun Control Now'--and that these slogans left room to fill in our own content behind them. I also acknowledged that "the underlying (and often explicit) agenda of the March was electoral action--getting students registered to vote, getting students to actually vote, and then voting against candidates who are identified with the NRA and, presumably, for candidates who support some type of gun 'reform' or 'control.' I suggested the possibility that future experiences and events might lead sections of such a movement (were it to sustain itself) to radicalize, as their illusions in politicians and the



government came up against reality. Based on this, I thought the development was positive, and offered opportunities to intervene to reach people on around a deeper understanding of causes of violence, issues of allied struggles, and fundamental solutions.

Since that email, there have been quite a few comments on the student protest. Wayne and Chris indicated they both had some conflict and uncertainty about this movement, and noted negatives as well as positives. Both seemed to suggest that, on balance, we should look for ways to intervene, rather than to oppose. I indicated that I agreed with the main line of these posts. I still do. I also

agreed with several comments from Roni that pointed to progressive aspects of the various protests, and suggested that we should be looking for ways to relate to the movement (should it actually exist) with our analysis and outlook. I have also read with great interest the many views and articles that our milieu has posted to date.

Let me begin with some of the important issues raised by Jack:

1) In his first email, Jack argued that this movement is 'not an oppositional movement.' I don't have a ready-made, or clear definition of what I think is or isn't an oppositional movement. Is a teacher's strike that demands that the state/State do something (grant a wage increase, for example) oppositional? I think so; I think Jack would agree, at least in most cases. So demanding that the state do (or not do) something is not our criteria. Are various protests and movements that are dominated by people whose strategy in electoral activity, and more specifically, support of Democratic Party candidates, not 'oppositional'? That would render one hell of a lot of social protest movements non-oppositional. (Remember, we are not discussing what our own point of view would be if we were involved in such a protest or movement; we are discussing whether belief in electoral activity--the belief of virtually all 'progressive' political movement today--would lead to non-participation/intervention in, and a united front approach to, said movement). In each of Jack's preceding arguments, he includes the demand for gun control along with the issue of making a demand on the state or having an electoral orientation. In this latter issue--the degree to which gun control as a demand of the current movement--is the issue that requires examination, not the mere fact of making a demand on the state or believing in electoral activity. In my view, the question is whether we should conclude that a movement whose official slogan is not 'gun control,' but whose sentiments are clearly in favor of some form(s) of gun law reforms should: a) be opposed; b) be ignored; c) be intervened in around views that might, among other things, identify: 1) the true source of society's violence; 2) the limitations (or, as some in our milieu would say, the uselessness) of any gun law reform; 3) the dangers of 'gun control' by the ruling class; 4) the important connections between school violence, street violence, and violence in the form of police violence, corporate violence, ruling class violence (including mass incarceration and capitalist war)?

2) Jack then discussed the role of neo-liberals, labor bureaucrats and NGOs in the 'March for Our Lives. Never Again' protests. He points out that these forces have co-opted other struggles that he views as oppositional (he mentions Occupy as an example, which I consider a considerably more radical development from the get-go movement than this weekend's student protests), arguing that these forces "don't have to herd it back into the system -- they just have to urge it to continue on its path of focusing on electoral means, calling for state regulation (de facto strengthening the state), and relying on 'well-intentioned' Democrats.'" My first problem with this is that I think it is an overly unified, static conception of Saturday's protests and whatever student movement might emerge next (though in his second email, Jack raises the possibility of more dynamic developments). My second issue is that Jack argument seems to ignore the fact that the Women's March on



Washington, much of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Oklahoma statewide teachers' strike all supported 'electoral means' to a considerable to a near-total degree. So, let's discuss: Is a teachers' strike for higher pay 'oppositional' because: 1) it is workers, not students?; 2) it is a strike, not a demonstration?, or, 3) because its demands (even if the demands might represent a de facto strengthening of the state to some degree, or even if the strikers support electoral activity, and more specifically electing Democrats) are more supportable? It seems to me the answer lies in point 3; demands for higher pay and better working conditions are, generally speaking, supportable without reservation, whereas the demands of this protest are (at a minimum) less so. Again, this suggests to me that how we see and interpret the demands of a

movement is key, and the arguments about electoralism or looking to the state as reasons to not take a united front approach are somewhat misplaced. (Demands mattered enough in the a 1968 NYC teacher strike--the Shanker-led AFT Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike--to raise vexing issues about support or opposition. I think the valid arguments both for and against support of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike, which pitted teacher rights against largely-African American demands for 'community control', have some parallels to vexing issues regarding the student protests.) Does the (heavily implicit) gun-control aspect of last week's marches trump other arguments for some type of united front support? I am not convinced that it does, but I grant that the point requires careful examination.



3) Jack goes on to say: "I am for raising relevant demands....In addition, I believe that we ought to begin to propagandize about the need for workplace and community defense guards; and that these will need to be armed (and why); and that this can't happen if we forfeit the right to bear arms....Given the nature and consciousness of the gun control movement, I expect that it will be difficult to raise these to the movement as a whole today. They can be raised to individuals, perhaps at times to a small group, etc. If / when the movement against police murders takes off again -- as I think that it will -- more may and hopefully will be possible."

I agree 100% with the four specific demands that Jack raised in his first email (and the additional demands he raised in his second email).. I also agree with the other suggestions Jack makes along with raising these demands. What I am less clear about is where Jack intends that we would raise these issues. In the Utopian? Or at

demonstrations/protests/actions, were they to continue? If the latter, then we may not have a significant difference. However, if our leaflets or other communications began with the words, "We oppose your movement and hope it goes away as quickly as possible; it is a reactionary development,' then we do have a significant difference. If, on the other hand, we took a united front approach to the broad issue of violence against people in our society (including students in schools), but went on to discuss our beliefs about what type of movement is needed, and what it should stand for, then we would have no significant difference, as I see it.

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Jack's second email raises a number of important issues.

1) Jack asks: "What do we think about gun control? Are we for no new regulation; are we for some regulation (e.g., of automatic weapons; of 'bump stocks" and other means of turning semi-automatic weapons (which only fire one shot at a time) into near-automatic weapons (by enabling them to fire nearly continuously)? Are we for more stringent regulation? Are we for restrictions on who can be licensed? And if we are for any of these, how do we prevent them from being used the way that state regulations are usually (although, admittedly, not always) used -- against those least able to defend themselves and most vulnerable?"

I think *some* gun regulations make sense. In this sense, I could consider myself in favor of 'gun reform,' though I would probably have significant differences with many people who might use the same phrase. Three points: 1) I don't have a worked out position on what I would be for or against; perhaps others do, and I would very interested to hear more on this. If 18-year-olds had the right to carry guns in school, I would be for laws that prohibited this. I am not sure where and to what degree people can carry loaded (concealed?) weapons into bars, baseball stadiums, soccer arenas, etc. I favor restrictions on this. In the 'Wild West,' you hung your guns at the saloon door (and I suspect that Marshall Dillon or Wyatt Earp could enforce this); it didn't threaten the Second Amendment, as far as I know, but perhaps that was because the NRA wasn't there to tell us that it did. 2) I think that the benefits of gun reform are vastly overblown by its proponents, and in this sense it is a 'phony solution.' That said, I disagree with those who think the

benefits of certain measures are non-existent. 3) Is there a slippery slope? Do *any* gun new gun regulations of any type open the door to the ending of broad gun ownership rights in the United States? I don't think so, but I think it is an issue worth exploring further.



2) Jack asks: "How do we counter the strong tendency in this movement to look to electoral means -- and in particular to electing 'sympathetic' Democratic Party politicians -- to implement regulations. (And how does this correspond to our attitude towards other areas -- for example, to the dominant wing of the environmental movement, which wants to strengthen state regulation; to the 'progressives' who look to Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and others to regulate Wall Street; etc.?)

I am not going to discuss this question in this already lengthy email, beyond saying that Jack is right to ask the question, and we should all be thinking about and discussing this issue.

3) Jack writes: "... these questions have to be answered dynamically: consciousness can change when people are in struggle, sometimes dramatically. Perhaps this will be the case here. Perhaps we will see significant sections move leftwards and come into conflict with the limits desired by the Democrats, the non-profiteers /NGOs, the billionaire globalists, the labor leadership, and the state (these groups are of course not mutually exclusive). As far as I can tell, that is not where this movement is at now, and I think that it (or sections of it) will have to go well beyond its current location and direction. Although I don't think that this is likely, I don't rule it out, and absent other targets, I think that folks

with the energy to do so should see if they can organize around this issue."

I agree with this. I don't think speculation on 'likely/unlikely' is particularly useful. For all I know, the movement is over.

4) Jack commented on the video posted by Shemon, saying: "I guess that I didn't see what so many others have seen. What I saw was a young black man saying that gun violence won't end until we get better schools, housing, etc. -- and putting the blame on Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner (a Republican so egregious he's like a pantomime villain) and other unidentified 'politicians.' In Chicago, this is not new and fresh." (Jack went on to give examples to support this view.)

I didn't see anything that Jack didn't see. To the degree that I (and Shemon as I understand him) was understood to be saying that there was some kind of 'new, strong, highly radical current' in last Saturday's protest, I think this is misinterpretation. I pointed to aspects of the DC demonstration that indicated a social justice/'change' consciousness (and to some degree a palpable/gut notion of race/gender/class solidarity) that was broader than (or 'other than') a narrow 'gun control now, everything else be damned' orientation. I continue to believe this. I also believe that the movement has not yet radicalized, and I don't know if it will.

5) Lastly, Jack joins Ron in stating: "I am for defending the 2nd Amendment. Should it come to that, we may wind up aligned with the NRA." He goes on to say, "But I don't want to be identified with them -- any more than I want my opposition to Hillary Clinton to be identified with Steve Bannon's (or Breitbart's, or the Koch brothers, etc.). I don't know that Ron disagrees with this, but I do want to clarify my position."

I am going to turn to Ron's email next, and will take up the 2nd Amendment/NRA issue there.

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Ron has written two major emails on the 'March for Our Lives. Never Again' protests and issues surrounding gun control. Some of the issues Ron has raised are addressed in the discussion above, but several important questions are not addressed.

1) In his first email, Ron wrote: "Not only has the current movement put significant wind in the sails of the gun control liberals, it has also facilitated calls for the outright repeal of the Second Amendment. Should such a movement build up any steam, I will be standing with those organizing to defend our gun rights, even if that means marching alongside the NRA!" He repeats this in his second email, and his view appears consistent with Jack's statement in support of defending the 2nd Amendment.



Two points here: 1) In an earlier email I think that I was overly dismissive of a possible attack on gun rights broadly. Justice Paul Stevens' call to repeal the 2nd Amendment is evidence of that. I continue believe that the underlying dynamic is overwhelming resistance to possibly sensible gun reforms--though not overwhelming opposition in terms of popular support; rather overwhelming politician opposition, due significantly to the role of the NRA--and overwhelming popular support for the fundamental right own guns (the 'Second Amendment), if you will. We can and should continue to discuss this. 2) I have been somewhat surprised by Ron and Jack's call to march in defense of the Second Amendment, and to do so alongside of the NRA. I have long thought that our tendency viewed the US Constitution as a 'bill of rights for capitalism'--that is to say, a document that, taken as a whole, protects and furthers the interests of the US ruling class/private property/capitalism. In this discussion, as I interpreted Ron's initial email, the 'March for Our Lives' was clearly reactionary, but marching in support of the 2nd Amendment to the US Constitution was assuredly 'progressive.' And being in some level



of alliance with one of the most right wing, reactionary, corrupt and corrupting organizations around (I'm not talking about the student movement; I'm talking about the NRA), wouldn't change that one bit. I would very much like to see further discussion of this question.

2) Ron writes: "I think the best way to do this (intervene--RM)) is by presenting a very maximal analysis of contemporary capitalism and outlining our revolutionary perspective, no matter how farfetched it may seem at this point. I do not believe that trying to 'united front' the movement on the specific issue of gun control, as per 'We support your demands and urge you to insist that the politicians adopt them and call on the state to enforce them,' is the way to do this. (Frankly, if this isn't the 'one-step to the left' method, I don't know what is.)"

I agree with Ron on both these points. In the period we are in (and given our numbers), I think our most important approach in most situations should be to present our maximal views. This certainly holds for the current situation. Like Ron, I reject relating to present movement on a "We support your demands and urge you to insist that the politicians adopt them and call on the state to enforce them." That would certainly be a 'one-step to the left method.' Moreover, what demands would we be supporting? I have suggested that we can be in a united front with a 'March for Our Lives. Never Again' movement by putting our own content into what *would* save 'our/peoples lives' and what *would not*. I have not seen any posting from our milieu that has suggested otherwise (but I may have missed something.) I stated my views on this in my comments on Jack's comments earlier in this email, and immediately above in my comments on Ron's comments. Perhaps Ron is misunderstanding my statement that this 'youth movement' (if it exists at all) might have to go through electoral activity and betrayal to radicalize. It might. But I explicitly said that this was not a matter of our accommodating our views to this possibility (which would be a next-step-to-the left approach.) I don't think widespread anti-capitalist, libertarian socialist/anarchist consciousness is likely in the next decade; does this suggest I am for 'Sander-ism?' I don't think a revolution--at least one remotely resembling anything we would wish to see--is likely in the next decade or two; does this suggest I am for reformism? Perhaps Ron can clarify further.

I look forward to continued discussion of the issues that have been raised by the many posts on this development.

Rod

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March 31  
Everybody,

In reply to Rod's last email:

1. My basic view of the anti-gun violence movement remains as it has been, although it is now somewhat more defined. I continue to have a "wait-and-see" attitude. (At least for now, this is consistent with Bill's "neither support nor oppose" formulation.) I wish to wait and see how the movement develops; specifically, whether it has any staying power, whether it develops any identifiable (and hopefully, radical or revolutionary) tendencies within it, whether it defines itself as being grounded in more than calls for stepped-up gun control, and whether it has any level of drive to establish itself as independent of the Democratic Party. (At the moment, I expect that the movement is extremely likely to orient to, and eventually to collapse into, the Sanders/Warren wing of the party, which appears to be making gun control a major plank in its platform.)

2. As long as my "wait-and-see" attitude prevails, I am taking a "united front" approach to those in our milieu who wish to support and intervene in the movement. In fact, I encourage them to do so, on whatever political and organizational basis they deem appropriate. I am anxious to see what happens.

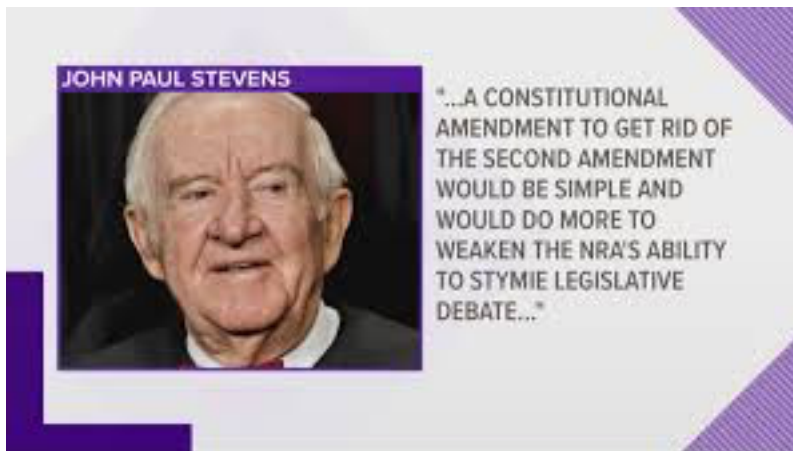
3. I continue to be extremely wary of calls for more gun control measures, since, as I understand it and as I've written, some of us are already prohibited from legally owning and possessing firearms. Do I wish to deny still other people (such as the mentally ill, the vast majority of whom are not violent and more likely to be victims of violence rather than perpetrators) of their gun ownership rights, especially since I remain unconvinced that any of the measures current being proposed, let alone others that gun control advocates may have in mind, would have prevented any of the mass shootings that have recently occurred.

4. I continue to believe very strongly in the right of people to own and to learn the use of firearms to protect themselves. As long as we live in a violent world, in which the overwhelming majority of violent acts are perpetrated by the ruling elites and the states they control, such a right seems to me to be foundational. For this reason, I feel that we are lucky to live in a society in which this right is enshrined in the foundational legal document of the country, the US Constitution. Although my defense of the right of armed self-defense is grounded on other, much more basic, theoretical considerations, ideals, and principles, I often describe my defense of this right (for "pedagogical purposes," to use Trotsky's term) as militant support of the Second Amendment.



5. I have been disturbed by the recent call by retired Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens for the repeal of the Second Amendment. This seems to have evoked a significant echo among some sectors of the ruling elite and their house intellectuals, as revealed by a spate of recent articles. One of these is a vicious screed in the April 5 New York Review of Books by Adam Hochschild. This despicable piece essentially smears all those who defend the right of members of our society to bear arms in self-defense as being responsible for and continuing in the tradition of those who utilized the Second Amendment (and the citizens' militias which it enabled) to capture and return runaway slaves to their "owners," slaughter American Indians, and commit other racist and genocidal acts, while failing to note that it was the Native Americans' mastery of firearms (along with their previous mastery of the horse, originally introduced into this continent by the

Spanish) that enabled them to resist their destruction for as long as they did, and that it was likewise the ownership and mastery of firearms that enabled Black people to resist the depredations of the Ku Klux Klan and other armed racists in the South in the aftermath of the Civil War and in the entire period since. Throughout history, it has been the aim and in the interests of the ruling classes to keep the populations over which they have ruled without access to, and skill in the use of, arms. In some countries, because of the specifics of their history, the "common people" have retained the rights to such access. This was (and still is) a crucial victory, even if such arms have often been used for oppressive purposes. I worry that the recent calls for the repeal of the Second Amendment may pick up significant support among the liberal wing of the ruling class, their intellectual servants, sections of the urban and suburban middle class, and even among currents on the left.



6. If such calls do pick up momentum and if there is a polarization in this country over the question of the defense or repeal of the Second Amendment, I will join in the movement to defend that amendment, and the right of individuals to possess firearms that it enshrines, whoever else may be participating in that movement. There are many organizations, beyond the NRA, that support the Second Amendment; not all of them are racist and reactionary. Even the NRA includes in its membership Black people, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, women, LGBTQ people, and members of other oppressed groups; not all the members of the NRA are racist and reactionary. Hopefully, there will be sections of the left with the intelligence and the courage to defend people's right to bear arms for purposes of self-defense. Therefore, hopefully, such a movement will be a united front of a number of organizations and

tendencies. In the past, we have marched and organized with members of organizations, such as the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, and the Spartacist League, that are/have been militant defenders of the some of the most putrid regimes that have ever existed and who advocate the establishment of a similar regime in this country. If, in the past, we have marched with such disgusting organizations in the promotion of what we believed to have been common causes, I, for one, would be willing to march with groups like the NRA.

Ron

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April 5  
All,

Some further thoughts after the March for Our Lives:

(1) Was it 'oppositional'? While the demonstrations were a mixed bag with lots of adults, non-profits and Democrats involved, overall I think they were oppositional. I write this for several reasons. First, young people started the action. It had the characteristics of a youth movement against grownups, especially politicians, who just didn't listen to them; and through their years of dillydallying, showed themselves to care more for contributions from the NRA and its retrograde leadership than for their safety and freedom from having to go through 'active shooter' drills. (Full disclosure: I'm a member of the NRA). In addition, as I wrote before, I believe that a lot of the students were, and are, concerned about college costs, student debt, war, racism and sexism, and general precariousness post-graduation as much as school safety. This is reflected in the Empower statement that I quoted earlier, in the Philadelphia video that Shemon posted, and by the student from Chicago (although he didn't mention police gun violence). Moreover, one of the organizers whom I know, Victoria Pannell, posted the following on Twitter: 'I have just as much chance of being killed by a cop as being killed by an AR-15 carrying, deranged, over privileged teen in a classroom. We can't address gun control without talking [#triggercontrol](#) 4 officers. Black people have replaced paper targets in "shoot to kill" [#NoMore](#)'. Finally, although this may be an outlier, the Oklahoma teacher walkout was preceded in at least one community, Bartlesville, by *students* who walked out of classes

in February to protest the Legislature's failure to vote for more school funding.

I think we will be able to get a better measure of the movement and its demands on 20 April, when there is a call for another student walkout in memory of the Columbine massacre. This one will be on a school day rather than a Saturday, and being the second one, could well come up against real school authority threats.



(2) I agree with Ron that were we, or anyone, to put out a statement, it should be very maximal. This is what I was trying to get at, although I admit clumsily, in my first post. As to other demands, I'm more for formulations like 'not oppose' rather than 'for'; e.g., I 'don't oppose' banning bump stocks rather than being 'for' that; or, I 'don't oppose' gun-free zones around schools and places of worship rather than being 'for' it. The same goes for background checks. While seemingly sensible to ferret out those who are unstable, who is to determine 'instability'? The state has plenty of paid psychologists on its payroll who will do whatever is necessary to advance their careers. Therefore, as good as these proposals seem, they can be turned against working class and oppressed people. In sum, I don't like the idea of doing the state's work for it. However, I'm outright against bans on 'assault' weapons and 21-year age limits on purchases. The former is dangerous for the defense of workers and communities as well as silly given the enormous numbers already in circulation; the latter I consider another grownup oppression of young people. Finally, I'm also

against lifetime bans on firearms for those convicted of felonies. Should people who went to jail at young ages, were released and then turned their lives around and lived trouble-free be prevented from owning guns? Other than the unfairness (which also applies to voting and housing, among other things), laws like this seriously weaken possible defense of our communities.

(3) Finally, a note on the Second Amendment. This, together with the rest of the Bill of Rights, may have been part of the foundation of the capitalist (and slave-holding) state. However, those rights codified in the Bill are to my mind democratic rights that should be upheld universally, including in a post-revolutionary libertarian society.

Peace,  
Bill

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# Who We Are

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To look for Utopia means providing a vision for the future – of a world worth living in, of a life beyond what people settle for as experience clouds their hopes. It means insisting that hope is real, counting on human potential and dreams.

Utopians do not accept “what is” as “what must be.” We see potential for freedom even in the hardest of apparent reality. Within our oppressive society are forces for hope, freedom, and human solidarity, possibilities pressing toward a self-managed, cooperative commonwealth. We don’t know if these forces will win out; we see them as hopes, as moral norms by which to judge society today, as challenges to all of us to act in such a way as to realize a fully human community.

We can describe some of these possibilities: worldwide opposition to the imperialist domination of the global economy; struggles against dictatorship in China, Syria, Egypt, and Venezuela; fights for national liberation in Ukraine, Kurdistan, and Palestine; cultural movements for the defense and recovery of indigenous languages and histories; changes in society’s acceptance of homosexuality, trans-gender freedom, and women’s equality, campaigns to defend the rights of immigrants and racial and religious minorities. The organized labor movement and the Black movement in the United States have – we hope – new utopian phases ahead.

But beyond these specifics, we are talking about something familiar to everyone, although difficult to get a handle on. In small ways, every day, people live by cooperation, not competition. Filling in for a co-worker, caring for an old woman upstairs, helping out at AA meetings, donating and working for disaster relief – people know how to live cooperatively on a small scale. What we don’t know, and no one has found a blueprint for, is how to live cooperatively on a national and international scale – even on the scale of a mass



political movement. Nobody has described how the society we want will look, or how to get it, though we know what it will be – a society where people are free to be good.

This is a good time to be publishing a journal dedicated to utopianism, revolutionary socialism, and anarchism. The left is no longer in retreat. The struggles of organized labor, the Black and Latino communities, women, lesbian/bisexual/gay/transgender people, indigenists, and environmentalists are gaining strength. Within the world of the organized left, the influence of anarchists and libertarian socialists has greatly increased.

But these are perilous times as well. The fabric of the post-World War II world system—a “democratic ideal” for Europe and the United States masking elite control and international domination—is fraying. In the U.S. and Europe we see ideals of openness and inclusion in collision with xenophobia and race resentment. The parties of reform – the Democrats in the U.S., the Social Democrats in Europe, the Christian Democrats in Latin America, the old nationalist parties in Africa and Asia (where they still exist) – have abandoned the idea of social reform and freedom from international capital; yet, at least in the U.S., the Democratic Party has lost none of its ability to absorb, blunt, and demoralize radical efforts at change from within. While the collapse of the Soviet bloc and China’s adoption of a capitalist economic system under a Communist political dictatorship have tarnished Marxism’s idealist image, they have also discredited, for many, the very idea of changing society fundamentally. As never since the early nineteenth century, many believe that market capitalism is the only path to human progress.

A highly problematic new phenomenon in recent years has been the rise of Islamicist or Jihadist religious fanaticism, which exploits radical hopes for escape from western domination as mass support for a tyrannical, socially regressive, and exceptionally brutal war against non-Muslims and the great majority of Muslims. This development is a response partly to the collapse of secular anti-imperialism in Africa, the Arab world, and Asia since fifty years ago, and partly to continuing European domination in these areas, now made worse by the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim backlash in Europe itself. The road forward, clearly, lies in rebuilding a democratic, radical anti-imperialism, but how this may occur we don’t know.

Moreover, with a few exceptions, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist groups remain small and their influence limited. Various kinds of reformism and Marxism still attract radical-minded people. Both these ideologies and their corresponding movements accept the state, capital-labor relations, conventional technology, and political authoritarianism.

But these are reasons why it is important to continue to work for freedom and speak of utopia. This racist, sexist, and authoritarian society has not developed any new charms. It remains exploitive and unstable, threatening economic collapse and environmental destruction. It wages war around the globe, while nuclear weapons still exist and even spread. Even at its best -- most stable and peaceful -- it provides a way of life that should be intolerable: a life of often meaningless work and overwork; hatred and oppression within the family, violence from the authorities; the continuing risk of sudden violent death for LGBT people, women, and Black people; the threat of deportation of undocumented immigrants. The very major reforms of the last period of social struggle, in the 1960s, while changing so much, left African Americans and other minority populations in the U.S. and around the world facing exclusion and daily police (state) violence, literally without effective rights to life. The videos we see every day (in which new technology makes visible what has always been going on) reveal, like sheet lightning, the reality of the system we live under. For this society, from its inception, to call itself "democracy" is a slap in the face of language.

This paradoxical situation -- a society in obvious decay but without a mass movement to challenge it fundamentally -- is, we hope, coming to an end. As new movements develop, liberal-reform and Marxist ideas will show new life, but so have utopian and libertarian ideas. We work with this in mind. We have to do what was not done during the last period of really radical social struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. Among other things, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist theory very much needs further development, including its critique of Marxism, and its ideas about how to relate to mass struggles, democratic and socialist theory, and popular culture. And we need to reinvigorate the ideals of anarchism/libertarian socialism and the threads in today's world that may, if we can find them and follow them, lead to a future worth dying for and living in.

This future, we state clearly, is an ideal, not a certainty. The lure of Marxism, for many, has been its seeming promise that a new world is objectively determined and inevitable. This idea is not only wrong but elitist and brutal: if the new society is inevitable then those who are for it are free to shoot or imprison everyone who stands in the way. That is the key to Marxism's development from utopia to dictatorship, which everyone except Marxists is aware of. Nor do we believe in an inevitable collapse of the present system—capitalism can push its way from crisis to crisis at its usual cost in broken lives and destroyed hopes. We believe people have to make ethical choices about whether to accept life as it is or to struggle for a new society, and then about whether the society they are for will be democratic or authoritarian. The only key to the future is a moral determination to get there, a dream of a world in which those who were obscure to one another will one day walk together. We do not know where this key may be found, but we know the only way to find it is to search for it.

That is who we are.

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