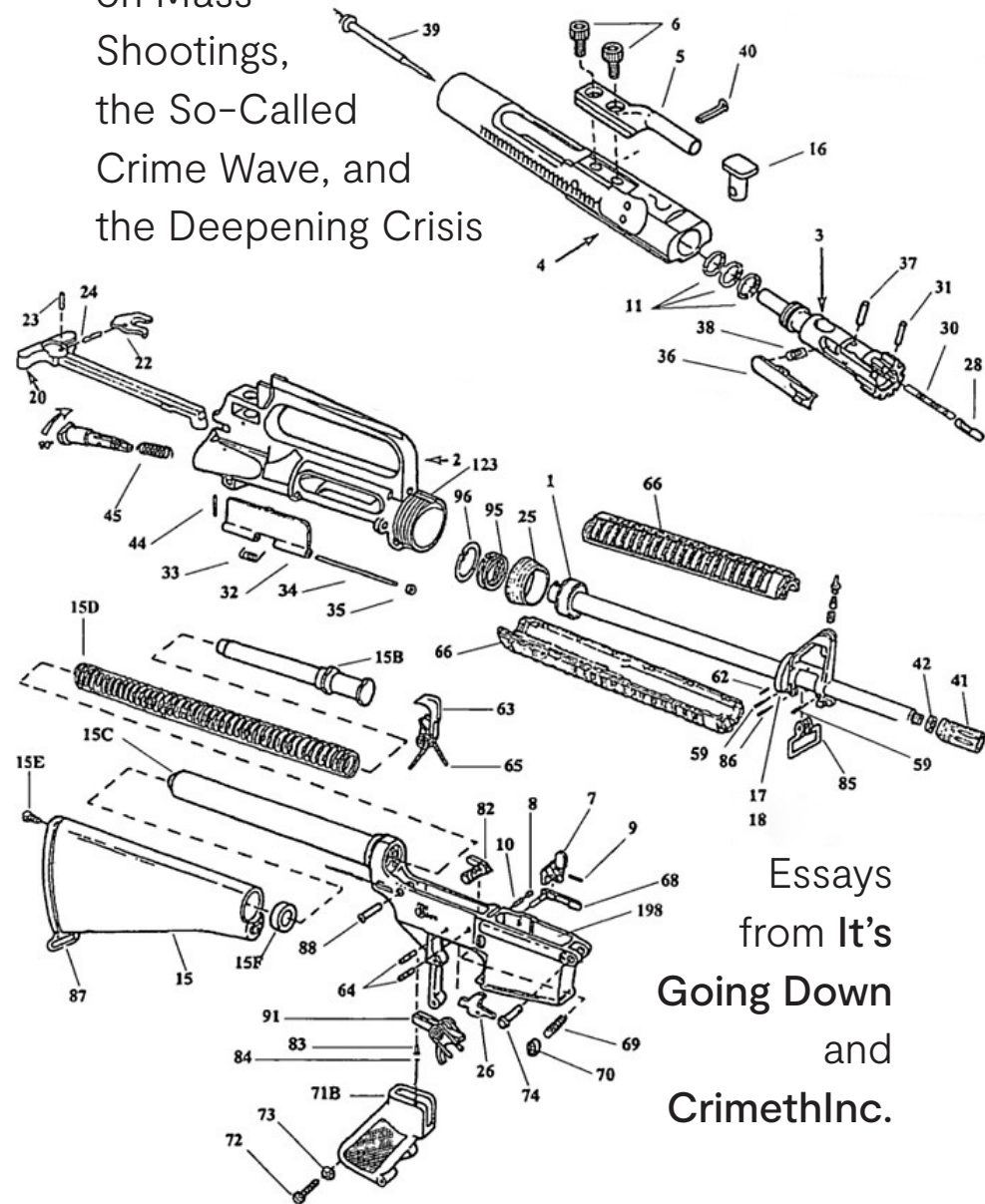
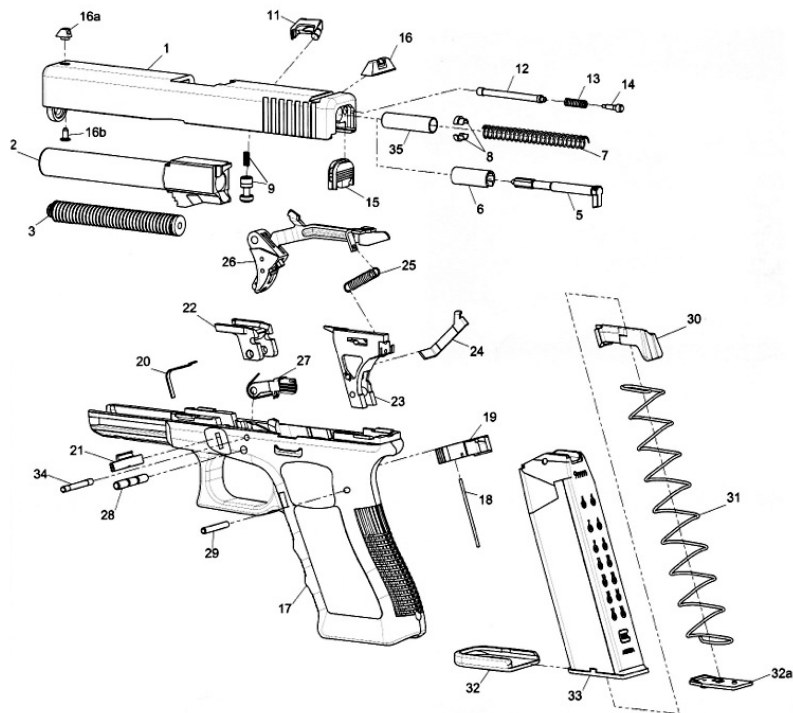


REACH FOR THE SKY

The role of police is not to protect, but to control.

It is not to prevent crises, but to determine who suffers in them.

Anarchist Analysis
on Mass
Shootings,
the So-Called
Crime Wave, and
the Deepening Crisis



Essays
from *It's
Going Down
and
CrimethInc.*

“... [T]he gun homicide rate in US cities is likely to have increased by 35 to 40 percent from **2019 to 2020**, which would be the biggest single-year increase on record. This was staggering, but we didn’t see it getting widespread attention outside of the communities most directly affected, predominantly people of color, who have suffered most during COVID-19. Resources and attention are critical because we have a pretty good toolbox of interventions for curbing gun violence.

Those kinds of services have fallen off during the pandemic, which likely explains part of the violence rise. But we also need to be able to see how gun violence is highly concentrated in neighborhoods with high rates of economic deprivation, trauma associated with past violence and now COVID, and poor access to resources. They’re also the most physically deteriorated and least conducive to community-building in shared spaces. We need to see that it’s not a coincidence that all of these burdens fall overwhelmingly on people of color, especially Black people. Our cities are racially segregated from decades of public policy that overtly and covertly aimed to maintain white dominance.”

Simply stated: the rise in gun violence predates both the pandemic and the George Floyd uprising – the fact that neoliberal legacy media has been ignoring it for years is of course not surprising, but the attempt to link it to anarchists and social movements for grassroots change; forces which are attempting to address the very inequalities leading to the rise in such violence, is clearly part of an organized smear campaign against social movements from below that would make grifters like Alex Jones on the conspiratorial Right beam with envy.

Not only are Portland anarchists and other assorted direct-action activists not responsible for the senseless violence and suffering in their city or its recent increase, they have consistently—physically and intellectually—been on the front lines fighting against it, in Portland and beyond. It’s for this reason that they are targeted: in the form of police brutality, denunciations from upper-crust bureaucrats, and the outright lies of every pundit with a political axe to grind that seeks to grease the wheels of State repression.

than in the past even after protests died down by the fall.

Beyond the protests, many critics of the “defund the police” movement have tried to paint a straight line from police budget cuts in certain cities to the rise in murders. But few cities have actually cut their police budgets to any significant degree. Only about a dozen of the roughly 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the U.S. had reduced their police budgets by the fall. And many of the cities that did cut police budgets blamed revenue shortfalls caused by the coronavirus pandemic rather than demands from demonstrators.”

Portland has real problems—gun violence is a real problem; its corrupt, racist, authoritarian police force and their two-faced enablers in its City Hall are real problems. But to smear anarchist resistance and the push to defund the police as contributing to that (without data) and to attempt to erase non-white anarchists in the process is particularly noxious. Shame on the *Post* for this.

Speaking of data, as the *New York Times* has reported, the major factors behind the increase in gun violence, (which soared well before ‘Defund the Police’ was a rallying cry), and has been exacerbated since the start of the pandemic, are the exact same forces of structural white supremacy and capitalist inequality and exploitation that anarchists have been fighting for centuries:

“Experts told *The Times* that the coronavirus has compounded the socioeconomic stressors that often give rise to gun violence, including poverty, unemployment, housing instability and hunger. In Kansas City, for example, my colleagues have reported that many recent shootings have seemingly had no clear rationale, often arising from petty arguments that devolve into violence. In many cases, economic hardship appeared to play a role. “The pandemic has exacerbated the root causes of gun violence,” Michael Sean Spence, policy and implementation director at the nonprofit group Everytown for Gun Safety, told *The Times*. “What we’re seeing is almost a perfect storm.”

To go even deeper, in an interview with *Boston University*, professor Jonathan Jay stated:

REACH FOR THE SKY

Anarchist Analysis on Mass Shootings,
the So-Called Crime Wave,
and the Deepening Crisis

- 1 Their Guns Won't Protect You, but They Can Get You Killed
- 2 Militarized Law Enforcement Isn't Protecting Us From Mass Shooters
- 3 Washington Post Echoes Trump in Falsely Claiming Protests Connected to Rise in Gun Violence

brutality, white supremacists and fascism over past decades.

This is willful erasure of the many, many Black, Latinx, Indigenous and Asian anarchists (and direct resisters more broadly) in Portland and throughout the Americas and the world—and a well-worn establishment smear tactic against dissidents, closely related to that of so-called “outside agitators,” which was frequently used to try to discredit the Civil Rights movement, dismiss the agency of non-white people, and discourage multi-racial solidarity.

Wilson’s piece also tries to link the push by some activists to defund the police with an increase in gun violence, when data from cities across the US over the past year shows that whether a given city increased or decreased police spending, this had no direct correlation to whether violent crime increased or decreased or to what extent.

As *Salon* wrote:

“... [D]ata shows that Republican-led cities and even those that increased police budgets have experienced similar spikes ... data compiled by crime analyst Jeff Asher from 51 cities shows that the murder rate in Democratic-led cities increased 36.2% through the fall, while the murder rate in Republican-led cities spiked by a virtually identical 35.6%.

Homicides were already on the rise by the time protests erupted in late May. A preliminary FBI report found that homicides were up by about 15% between January and June. A report from the Council on Criminal Justice showed that homicides were up 25% in 27 major cities between April and June from the previous three years. The latter report did find a brief spike in homicides immediately following the protests, as officers pulled back patrols or were re-assigned to police protests, took extended leave or early retirement, and solved far fewer crimes. But that was not a significant factor overall, ultimately amounting to “fewer than one additional death in each [of the cities tracked]” per day, with most of the increase taking place in Chicago, wrote Weihua Li, a data fellow at The Marshall Project. In fact, Chicago had increased its police budget in eight consecutive years ahead of the spike and has nearly tripled its per capita police spending over the last six decades. Homicides remained far higher

Last year, Farah Stockman of the *New York Times*, after reaching out to local activists who pushed back against her narrative, used an out of town far-Right conspiracy theorist, Jeremy Lee Quinn, a former YouTube comedian, as the main source to push false conspiracy theories about anarchists in Portland supposedly derailing the Black Lives Matter movement. Since the opinion piece appeared, Quinn has gone on to push further conspiracies about the attempted pro-Trump coup on January 6th, which he attended and filmed. Quinn claims that the 6th was partially instigated by 'Antifa' and inspired by "anarcho black bloc tactics which have origins in West Berlin in 1982 & Seattle 1999." In numerous editorials on far-Right websites, Quinn would downplay the violence on January 6th, along with the role of far-Right, militia, and white nationalist groups in the storming of the capitol, writing: "Are these fringe outliers truly representative of the wider mass? We could ask the same of the left." Such conspiratorial talking points have gone on to form the backbone of the Republicans opposition to an inquiry into the January 6th attempted coup, while Trumpian forces openly call for a military dictatorship.

Although one would hardly know it from the lack of coverage in the neoliberal press, anarchists have been involved in everything from organizing the first labor unions in fast-food restaurants in the area, providing mutual aid in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and to those displaced by recent fires, fighting to save old-growth forests, and being on the front-lines of struggles against the far-Right and ICE. This is to say nothing of the dedication that anarchists – in particular young folks, have had in the face of non-stop police and State violence that has led to multiple hospitalizations, activists disappeared by federal troops, and people being exposed to chemical and projectile weapons on a mass scale. Is it any wonder why in the aftermath of the Derick Chauvin trial, Rodney Floyd, the brother of George Floyd thanked protesters in Portland specifically for demonstrating non-stop; acknowledging that this pressure on the street pushed the State to make concessions.

Further, Wilson directly claims that anarchists in Portland—and implies that anarchists more broadly—are "mostly White" (capitalization: the Post's). Their source on this? Literally just Portland's mayor and chief of police, both of whom are highly opposed to and have been embarrassed by Portland anarchists' morally consistent direct resistance against police

THEIR GUNS WON'T PROTECT YOU, BUT THEY CAN GET YOU KILLED

Why Neither Policing nor Gun Control Will Suffice to
Stop the Shootings

Neither Republican calls for more guns and policing nor Democrat demands for more gun control can put an end to the epidemic of mass shootings in the United States. The problem runs deeper than either of these approaches can address.

A week and a half after an 18-year-old white supremacist murdered ten Black people in a mass shooting in a Buffalo supermarket, another 18-year-old killed nineteen children and two teachers at a school in Uvalde, Texas attended by predominantly working-class and Latino/Latina students. The husband of one of those teachers subsequently died of a heart attack brought on by grief.

The town of Uvalde budgets almost half a million dollars for school security and monitoring services, augmented by \$69,000 from the Texas state government for metal detectors, barriers, security systems, "campus-wide active shooter alarm systems," and the like. Despite receiving almost 40% of the city budget and an additional half a million dollars of state grant money, the Uvalde police dragged their feet for an unusually long time during the massacre while parents begged them to do something.

As anarchists have documented, militarizing police has done nothing to protect people from mass shootings. In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death for children in the United States. Police killings were already among the leading causes of death for young men.

Creating a society based on coercion and control does not protect us. All the money that city, state, and federal governments have channeled to police departments has made them a more powerful force in our society, but this has made us no safer. They don't use those weapons to stop people from harming us, but to protect themselves, pursue their own interests, and dominate us.

According to the courts, police officers have no duty to protect students from being killed in the first place. *That's not what police are for. The role of police is not to protect, but to control. It is not to prevent crises, but to determine who suffers in them.* The footage of police physically restraining parents while their children were murdered speaks volumes about this.

Both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party are taking advantage of this opportunity to repeat their talking points about who should or shouldn't have guns. But neither of them are acknowledging the root causes of the problem. Both of them are proposing responses that can only feed into the vicious cycle that produced this tragedy in the first place.

The Republicans...

Republicans, long tied to the National Rifle Association and the gun industry, have responded to this massacre by calling for more police and more guards at schools. They have consistently sought to defund schools and to limit what can be taught or even said in them, but they are eager to funnel ever more resources towards the security industry. Of course, flooding our society with even more weapons will not cut down on the number of shootings, whether by on-duty police, off-duty police, or others who have access to their guns.

Some Republicans have written mass shootings into their playbook, weaponizing these tragedies as an opportunity to spread disinformation and hatred. Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar, known for participating in white nationalist conferences, claimed that the shooter was a “transsexual

WASHINGTON POST ECHOES TRUMP IN FALSELY CLAIMING PROTESTS CONNECTED TO RISE IN GUN VIOLENCE

On, May 31, 2021, the *Washington Post* published an incredibly dishonest, defamatory and reactionary smear piece by a reporter named Scott Wilson with the headline: “Anarchists and an increase in crime hijack Portland’s social justice movement.” The entire framing, starting with the headline itself (which was predictably amplified by supposedly high-minded, “nuanced” reactionaries like Jonathan Chait and Glenn Greenwald), is that anarchist resistance is in some way connected to the city’s recent increase in gun violence, which isn’t directly supported (nor directly claimed) anywhere in the article. In reality, as researchers have pointed out for years, the rise in gun violence is directly related to systemic white supremacy and poverty created by capitalism – all things which anarchists exist to oppose.

This isn’t even getting into Wilson’s direct claim that anarchists—who have been active in the Pacific Northwest region in a variety of social movements throughout the decades, have somehow “hijacked” (subliminal terrorism association) “legitimate” resistance (read: non-establishment-threatening, non-Democratic Party aligned, non-profit ordained and managed) over the past year. This same false claim has been repeated ad nauseam by Portland mayor Ted Wheeler and other neoliberal opinion columnists.

have no legal imperative to protect us. In *Castle Rock v. Gonzales*, the US Supreme Court ruled that police do not have a constitutional duty to protect someone.

The police do not care about us and will almost always favor their own survival than the people they are “supposed” to protect. “Protect and Serve” is a highly effective PR campaign to trick people into thinking the police deserve the power they have and the violence they perpetuate is just the price we pay to be saved when there is a mass shooter or some other acute violence.

Defund, Disarm, Dismantle

Boulder’s Chief of Police is expected to request additional funding for policing on April 27th as her department is losing officers left and right, which is in part due to local anti-police organizing. It wasn’t a lack of equipment, personnel, or training that prevented SWAT from stopping the Boulder shooter, it was a lack of will to “protect and serve” the community members who were being murdered.

The Boulder Police Department and their allies in city government have already begun the PR spin that the police response was swift, fearless, and effective, as police departments do after every crisis. It is imperative that community members see through the seizing of crisis to build power by police departments, particularly when they consistently fail to protect our communities from immediate harm.

The rote back-patting of law enforcement for their supposed bravery at the end of every tragedy is a form of myth-making that serves to make people feel indebted to the police, and as a result, more compliant to their orders and the white supremacist hegemony they enforce. Every dollar given to the Boulder Police Department in the false hope that it will stop another mass shooting will be used to maintain the force’s disproportionate stop and arrest rate of Black people and their scorched earth policy on people experiencing homelessness.

leftist illegal alien,” repeating a lie that had appeared on the far-right recruiting platform 4chan. Right-wing media personality Candace Owens also spread this lie. It was no coincidence that a group of bigots repeated this claim as they assaulted an underage trans girl shortly afterwards.

Some rank-and-file Republicans may be credulous enough to believe these lies, which are constantly updated to keep ahead of fact-checkers in the news cycle. Other Republicans surely recognize them as falsehoods—but in a world of fake news, boldly proclaimed falsehoods are interpreted as a show of force.

This cynical strategy creates a feedback loop. The worse things get, the further society descends into self-destructive violence, the more opportunities there are to blame this violence on an Other—whether trans, leftist, undocumented, or Black—against whom ever more violent force is required. This is why no amount of mass shootings—and there have already been 214 this year—will discredit the Republicans, as far as their base is concerned.

...The Democrats...

Democrats, on the other hand, have called for more gun control. Some Democrats on the left are even coming around to understanding that no amount of policing is going to put a stop to mass shootings. But the problem is—who would enforce stricter gun laws? The police, of course. And they would enforce those laws just as selectively, and with just as much racism and violence, as they enforce all the other laws on the books.

There are more than 400 million privately owned firearms in the United States, well over one per human being. Now that those are in circulation, it will be hard to put the genie back in the bottle. Buy-back campaigns might have some small impact, but as long as there are armed white nationalists and armed police, other people will be rightly hesitant to give up their guns. Until our society is ready for multilateral disarmament—including the state—those guns are going to stay in circulation, and police efforts to *control* them will only lead to more imprisonment and police violence.

If, at the end of an unprecedentedly invasive crackdown, only police retained access to firearms in the United States, that would not put an

end to white supremacist mass shootings like the one in Buffalo. Police are disproportionately involved in white supremacist movements—even if we don't count the murders they commit on the job.

Even when Democrats criticize the behavior of police—for example, their cowardice in Uvalde—this always serves to rationalize directing more resources towards police and their surrogates. As long as the logic of the punitive justice system remains unquestioned, even the fiercest criticisms will be used to justify calls for new police training compounds and programs.

Republicans don't want to hinder white vigilantes' gun access, because they see white vigilantes as essential to preserving the prevailing social order. Democrats want the state to have a monopoly on force, because they believe that this is the best way to preserve that same social order. Under Biden, Democrats have done everything they can to rehabilitate the image of police while falsely associating the steady increase in violence and desperation with movements to abolish police and efforts to abolish the disparities in wealth and power that the police exist to impose.

...And Us

What is the solution, then? What can we do to put a stop to mass shootings?

If the police exist to protect the wealthy (and themselves), then as disparities in wealth and power increase, the police will protect fewer and fewer people. This is not a sign of their failure; it is precisely what they have always done.

The gulf between the wealthy and the poor has steadily increased for decades now, alongside police violence and mass shootings. The resulting desperation and despair contribute to people becoming mass shooters. The same goes for the scapegoating and demagoguery that arise in such a profoundly unequal, fearful, and acrimonious society.

If we want to stop the shootings, in the long run, we have to abolish all the mechanisms that create these inequalities, and all the forces that preserve capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. In this regard, the fight to stop mass shootings must set itself much broader goals if it is to succeed.

they had removed all while shots were being fired, or had been recently fired, is unacceptable and contrary to accepted protocol.”

In 2019, when two shooters attacked the STEM School in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, it was not the police who stopped the shooters, but students and a private security guard (who accidentally shot two other students with a gun he was not supposed to have). Despite the lack of police involvement in stopping the shooting, then President Donald

Trump thanked “first responders” for “bravely intervening” in the shooting.

In 2015 when white supremacist Dylan Roof attacked the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, police arrested him the next day, well after he had completed his attack and attempted suicide.

While there isn't enough information yet to determine what the Atlanta Spa shooter's plan, it is likely the shooter was apprehended after he completed his attacks and was fleeing to Florida.

In 2013, when Sandy Hook Elementary School was attacked, police parked a quarter mile away from the school, walking along the tree line to get to the school, and were ultimately unsuccessful at stopping the shooting. However, immediate organization from teachers and faculty to barricade and hide children from the shooter did save lives.

This same mutual aid was likely crucial at preventing further loss of life during this week's shooting as armored police sat and waited outside.

They Don't Care About Us

There has been decades of police reform and militarization to respond faster and more effectively to mass shootings since Columbine, and yet we frequently see police put their own safety above that of the people they are supposed to protect. The military equipment purchases justified by tragedies like Columbine are much more frequently and effectively used against struggles for liberation than mass shooters.

In Boulder, only 5% of the police department live in the city. They are not part of the community. They drive in from out of town to harass homeless people and their allies, maintain Boulder's white super-majority, and ensure that business runs smoothly. As many already know, the police

Community members who watched the livestream were outraged by the painstakingly long response by SWAT to stop the shooting.

While victim's families were still trying to find out the status of their loved ones, the community was subjected to a press conference in which Boulder Police Department Commander Yamaguchi eulogized Officer Talley, emphasized his status as a police officer, and made specific requests to respect his family. The nine other victims were simply mentioned as a "loss of life." Commander Yamaguchi then praised the 45-minute response time to the shooting as "quick" and congratulated his department and the others that responded.

That night, the Boulder Police Department held a memorial caravan for officer Talley the night of the shooting which greatly disrupted traffic. Authorities had not yet released the identities of the victims, nor announced the death toll. Police from around the state held another memorial caravan on Wednesday for officer Talley, and no one else.

Decades of Failure

Standing around outside mass shootings in military gear is unfortunately how many of these horrific attacks are handled by law enforcement.

The police who responded to the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School were widely criticized for their slow delay in entering the school and their failure to stop the shooters.

The Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida occurred as an off-duty cop hired as security abandoned his post. Police responded to the shooting by arresting injured victims instead of apprehending the shooter.

A Florida State Commission report on the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida echoes what we witnessed on Monday in Boulder, stating that, "None of these BSO deputies immediately responded to the gun shots by entering the campus and seeking out the shooter." Further delays to stopping the Parkland shooter were attributed to police running back to their cars to retrieve body armor:

"Deputy sheriffs who took the time to retrieve vests from containers in their cruisers, removed certain equipment they were wearing so that they could put on their vests, and then replaced the equipment

During active shooter drills at schools across the United States today, children are taught that their best bet in the event of a shooting is to fight back—to throw textbooks or chairs or whatever they can get their hands on at the shooter. This is the response of a society that doesn't intend to protect children, that never has protected them. It indicates that we really are on our own. We have to understand this and start organizing accordingly, rather than putting our faith in politicians of any party.

One of the fundamental roles of police is to discourage us from solving problems ourselves, so we defer both our own safety and the resolution of conflict to the authorities. Yet most parents will risk more to protect their children than the police ever will. What would have been necessary for the parents in Uvalde to have been able to successfully address the shooting themselves, in defiance of the police? What grassroots institutions would need to exist, what resources and skills would need to circulate? It's horrifying to acknowledge, but we are in a situation in which more and more of us really have no better option.

If it's up to us to address these shootings, then rather than looking to the Democrats to tighten gun control via legislation and police action, we might begin by asking what a direct action campaign targeting the gun industry itself might look like. What if we could sidestep the Rube Goldberg machine of party politics entirely to cut into the profit margins of the corporations that have been making a killing selling firearms?

There is no safety without self-determination. To be safe, we have to be the ones who define what counts as safety, and we have to have the power to shape the conditions of our lives. So far, the most effective participants in the movement against mass shootings have been the students who have staged walkouts from their schools. Another starting point is to make sure that student organizers have all the support and resources they require as they figure out for themselves how best to preserve their lives.

If school has taught today's students anything, it is that those who make decisions on their behalf do not always have their best interests at heart. In the world that they are entering—fraught with tremendous disparities, threatened by climate catastrophe, and wracked by civil conflict—the most important thing they could learn is how to act collectively to defend each other. That is the skill they are going to need, more than any prerequisites or job training.

—“When Cutting Class Is a Matter of Life and Death”

MILITARIZED LAW ENFORCEMENT ISN'T PROTECTING US FROM MASS SHOOTERS

On March 24th, 2021, a man shot up a King Soopers grocery store in Boulder, Colorado, killing nine workers and shoppers and one police officer. I live nearby and heard about the shooting when a comrade sent me a local Libertarian's livestream of the tragedy as it was happening. About five minutes into the livestream and roughly six minutes since the first shots were fired, four Boulder Police officers rushed into the store. They were met with what sounded like gunshots, then two of the officers ran out of the King Soopers entrance. This is likely the moment Officer Eric Talley was killed.

For the next 45 minutes, SWAT from neighboring municipalities rallied outside of the King Soopers, but despite their advanced body armor, firearms, and training, they did not go inside. As gunshots continued to ring out from inside the store, militarized police waited outside of the grocery store. There were around 100 police officers, decked out from head to toe in protective gear, holding AR-15s, huddled around the corner of an active shooting scene for fear of being ambushed, as employees and shoppers hid in back rooms and under trash cans, fearing for their lives. Boulder Police Department claims that no one was killed after those four officers first entered the building, but the slow response of SWAT to stop the shooter prolonged the danger and trauma of the innocent people still trapped inside, and delayed emergency medical responses for the victims. Predictably, SWAT eventually entered the store and apprehended the white-passing shooter alive after he surrendered.