

Gunman shot to death after opening fire on Republican congressmen, aides

Patrick Martin
15 June 2017

A 66-year-old man, apparently angered to the point of explosion by the election of Donald Trump, was shot and killed by police in Alexandria, Virginia Wednesday morning after he opened fire on a group of Republican congressmen, aides and lobbyists as they practiced for a charity baseball game.

According to press reports, James T. Hodgkinson accosted two congressmen leaving the parking lot of the baseball field about 7 a.m. Wednesday, asking them if the group practicing were Democrats or Republicans. When they identified themselves as Republicans, he turned and went towards the field.

Hodgkinson opened fire with a semiautomatic rifle, wounding Representative Steve Scalise of Louisiana, the House majority whip; Zack Barth, an aide to Representative Roger Williams of Texas; Matt Mika, a lobbyist for Tyson Foods; and two Capitol Police officers, David Bailey and Crystal Griner, working as bodyguards for Scalise, who returned fire.

Two Alexandria city police, responding to 911 calls, joined in the gunfire, and Hodgkinson was shot to death under circumstances that have yet to be fully explained. Hodgkinson fired at least 50 shots, wounding five people. It is not known how many shots the four police fired or how many bullets struck their target.

Scalise, the most seriously wounded of the five victims of the shooting, underwent surgery Wednesday afternoon and was listed as critical but stable. None of the five suffered life-threatening injuries, according to preliminary medical reports.

According to reports based on his social media postings and political activities, Hodgkinson was idealistic and concerned about rising economic inequality and other social issues. He was outspoken in his hometown of Belleville, Illinois, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, writing many letters

to the editor and joining in a protest in 2012 outside the local post office, where he carried a sign identifying himself as part of the bottom 99 percent and calling for taxing the rich.

Belleville, Illinois is a working class suburb of St. Louis. According to press reports from the St. Louis media, Hodgkinson was married, with at least one child. He had an uneventful personal life, his main contacts with police involving traffic citations.

In 2016, he traveled to Iowa to support Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders in his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. A photo of Sanders was featured on his Facebook page. The defeat of Sanders and the election of billionaire Donald Trump seem to have left him so distraught that he ultimately wasted his life in a very tragic and counterproductive fashion.

In December, Hodgkinson closed the business he had operated for more than 30 years as a home inspector, tracking down mold, radon and other problems. In March, according to statements by his wife and several acquaintances, he left Belleville and moved to Alexandria, across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, where he reportedly lived out of his van, using the facilities of the local YMCA.

Several regulars at that YMCA gave media interviews in which they described Hodgkinson as quiet, unassuming, seemingly normal, and expressed surprise that he could explode in violence. This YMCA was adjacent to the baseball field where the team of Republican senators, representatives and aides practiced for a charity game set for June 15.

As is usually the case in such tragedies, the violent event brought out the worst in the political establishment. President Donald Trump took it upon himself to make public the news of Hodgkinson's

death, delivering the announcement with evident relish.

Trump, who regularly vilifies his critics in the crudest terms and once suggested that the only proper response to a Hillary Clinton presidency involved the exercise of Second Amendment rights (i.e., shooting her), put on his most insincere face, declaring, “We may have our differences, but we do well in times like these to remember everyone who serves in our nation’s capital is here because, above all, they love our country. We can all agree we are blessed to be Americans.”

Congressional Democrats and Republicans followed suit, declaring their undying solidarity with each other, beginning with speeches to the House of Representatives from Speaker Paul Ryan and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi. Such performances, which combine sanctimony and mawkishness, only underscore the reality spelled out by President Obama after the election: the conflicts between Democrats and Republicans are “intramural” scrimmages between two groups that in the final analysis are on the same anti-working class team.

The immediate effect of Hodgkinson’s misguided attack will be to strengthen the police state preparations of the federal government. There were reinforced security measures on Capitol Hill and anywhere that congressmen were to meet the public, including town hall meetings in their districts, which have been the occasion for raucous protests, particularly over the escalating attacks on health care.

Some Republican went further, suggesting that there should be a crackdown on criticism of President Trump and his party. Representative Chris Collins of Buffalo, New York, a leading Trump supporter in Congress, said after the shooting, “I can only hope that the Democrats do tone down the rhetoric. The rhetoric has been outrageous... the finger-pointing, just the tone and the angst and the anger directed at Donald Trump, his supporters.” Collins compared the gunman to protesters who had occupied his congressional office as part of a campaign against the health care cuts being imposed through legislation to repeal Obamacare.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact