

Thousands attend funerals for victims of Pittsburgh synagogue massacre

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Thousands of people have been attending the funerals for the victims of the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh this past Saturday. The outpouring was a sign of popular opposition to the horrific act of anti-Semitic violence and the political climate that contributed to it.

On Tuesday, services were held for Jerry Rabinowitz, 66, of Edgewood, and brothers Cecil, 59, and David Rosenthal, 54, of Squirrel Hill and Daniel Stein, 71, of Squirrel Hill. On Wednesday, thousands of mourners attended three services for Joyce Fienberg, 75, of Oakland, Irving Younger, 69, of Mount Washington, and Melvin Wax, 87, of Squirrel Hill.

On Thursday, services were held for husband and wife Sylvan Simon, 86, and Bernice Simon, 84, of Wilkinsburg, who were both killed in the attack. A separate service was held for Richard Gottfried, 65, of Ross. Gottfried a dentist, worked part of his time in clinics providing free care to refugees and those that couldn't afford dental care.

Funeral services will be held today for Rose Mallinger, 97, of Squirrel Hill, the oldest of the victims.

The 11 people were shot and killed Saturday while attending morning services at the Tree of Life synagogue in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh.

Religious leaders have invited the public throughout the country to attend Solidarity Shabbat services Friday night and Saturday to express their sympathy for the victims and to oppose anti-Semitism. The victims were killed last Saturday while observing the Jewish sabbath or day of rest.

Attorneys for Robert Bowers, 46, the chief suspect in the massacre, entered pleas of not guilty to 44 counts, including 11 counts of murder, for the killing of 11 worshipers at the Tree of Life synagogue. On Wednesday, a federal grand jury in western Pennsylvania indicted Bower on 11 counts of obstruction of free exercise of religious freedom resulting in death, and 11 counts of using a firearm during a crime of violence.

Bowers, who is reportedly a truck driver from nearby Baldwin, is accused of entering the synagogue shortly before 10 am last Saturday carrying an AR-15 assault rifle and 3 handguns and shouting "all Jews must die" as he began

shooting.

Social media posts made by Bowers in the weeks and days before the attack make clear that he targeted the synagogue because of work done there in connection with HIAS (formally the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), which relocates refugees from war-torn Syria, Latin America and throughout the world to the Pittsburgh area. HIAS is the oldest refugee organization in the world, having assisted refugees for more than 130 years.

Just before his bloody assault, Bowers wrote, "HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in."

The political climate for this rampage has been created by the fascist speeches of President Donald Trump. In the past few weeks, the president has referred to the caravan of Central American refugees as an army of invaders out to steal jobs, commit crimes and steal social services from native born residents. He also accused Democratic donor George Soros, who is Jewish, of funding the caravan, an accusation that was taken up by far right and fascist web sites.

These xenophobic rants incited the violence in Pittsburgh and others acts, including the sending of pipe bombs to prominent Democrats and critics of Trump by an avid Trump supporter and the murder of two African-Americans at a grocery store in Kentucky.

"Trump uses language like 'invaders' and 'army' whenever he is talking about poverty stricken migrants coming from Central America," Sam, a coal miner from the Pittsburgh area, told the *World Socialist Web Site* said. "This is like music to the ears to mentally ill people like (Bowers). Trump's rhetoric is reinforcing their illusions that immigrants are responsible for our problems."

Sam specifically singled out the Democrats for their role. "I don't know what to say about the Democrats. A few months ago, some of them were saying to get rid of ICE but they quickly dropped that. It's all politics to them.

"They want to tiptoe around the issue (of immigration).

They don't really care about children being separated from their parents, or people living in poverty being treated like criminals just because they are trying to come to America to have a better life.

"Obama deported more immigrants than anyone else. They have ceded the issue to Trump who sprouts this hatred. For the Democrats the issue is 'Russian meddling' and 'Me Too.'

"The Democrats are allowing the president to claim that people from Central America or the Middle East are a threat to America. They are giving people who are not doing very well someone to blame for their problems--not the CEO and corporate executives who are making obscene profits. Immigrants are not the reason the coal companies are giving miners the worst possible health care package, or why the company can draft (forced overtime) a miner to work weekends, or miners are dying from black lung."

Even as the Pittsburgh funerals were taking place, Trump gave a White House speech Thursday night, once again denouncing the "invasion" of immigrants and accusing those seeking to escape the dire conditions in the Central American countries long ravaged by American imperialism of being human traffickers, drug dealers and violent criminals. The president said he planned to strip migrants of the right to claim asylum if they were inside the US and he gave a greenlight to US troops being sent to the border to shoot children, "if they throw rocks at our military."

NBC News reported that the president was scheduled to give the provocative speech earlier in the week but postponed it because of the Pittsburgh killings.

When Trump arrived in the city Tuesday, he was met by thousands of demonstrators who protested in Squirrel Hill and other areas of Pittsburgh. About 200 students from the University of Pittsburgh and other universities in the area, hastily gathered outside UPMC hospital when students learned that Trump had gone there to visit wounded police officers.

Jackie, Madison, and Haley, students at University of Pittsburgh, attended the protest. "A lot of people specifically told him not to come here and he came anyway," noted Jackie.

Madison said that immigrants are "definitely used as a scapegoat for a lot of things that are unfair. I think the way we've been handling it as a country is not the right answer. Some of the things that the Trump administration has proposed are inhumane." Tomika Kinsley, a certified nurse's assistant said, "Trump shouldn't have come here when everyone was telling him not to. He promotes hatred and seeks to divide people."

Pierre Mballa and Gill VauGhn-Spencer, students at Point Park University in downtown Pittsburgh, denounced Trump

for creating the climate for the synagogue massacre. Pierre said, "I think we are living in a time when our President is spreading a lot of hate and vitriol. When events like this happen, the two can't help but be correlated. We have protests when our president is coming and that just shows that people are not supportive of him and what he does."

Gill added, "It's sad to see that people are so divided. He is spreading so much hate that even now, when he comes to pay his respects, people hate it, nobody wants him around because he created the situation that allowed this to happen."

"The people who he is labeling as invaders are people from this continent and South America," Pierre said. "America is a country made up of immigrants. I am an immigrant. If Trump passes that executive order saying that people born in the United States are not citizens, you are basically going against the fundamentals of what the USA is."

Workers in other cities also denounced Trump's anti-immigrant tirade.

A Fiat Chrysler worker from Kokomo, Indiana told the WWS, "If we go down the road of scapegoating immigrants, all workers will be victimized the same way. The government is ripping families apart and treating people seeking asylum worse than animals. It's time we wake up and realize that powerful forces are trying to divide us, and we stand up to oppose it."

An autoworker in Detroit added, "The rich need an external enemy to draw attention away because workers are starting to go after them."



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