

# Fascist gunman attacks California synagogue

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An anti-Semitic gunman killed a woman at the Chabad of Poway synagogue Saturday morning. A full-scale massacre was avoided only because the shooter's AR-15 semi-automatic weapon apparently jammed before he could carry out his intention of slaughtering dozens of Jewish worshippers attending a service on the final day of Passover. The victim, 60-year-old Lori Gilbert-Kaye, was a shopkeeper married to a doctor.

The attacker, 19-year-old John T. Earnest of San Diego, fled the scene but called 911 soon afterwards to report the attack and surrendered to police without resistance. Only hours before the shooting, he posted an anti-Semitic declaration on the internet in which he revealed that he had also carried out an arson attack March 24 on a mosque in San Diego, damaging the building but causing no injuries.

While the media and the political establishment will dismiss Earnest with the label "lone gunman," he emerges from a definite social and political milieu, responding to political appeals to nationalism and racism of which the current occupant of the White House is the most notorious purveyor.

Trump sought to distance himself from the killer in a perfunctory statement condemning anti-Semitism as he boarded his helicopter on the White House lawn, headed for a campaign rally in Green Bay, Wisconsin. But less than 24 hours before the synagogue attack, Trump was defending the political co-thinkers of Earnest, the neo-Nazis who rioted in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. He reiterated his declaration at the time that there were "very fine people" among those who marched with torches and chanted "Jews will not replace us." He had not been mistaken, Trump said, but had "answered perfectly."

The Poway murderer paid tribute in his internet statement to those he identified as his heroes, particularly Brenton Tarrant, the gunman who slaughtered 50 Muslims at two mosques in

Christchurch, New Zealand, last month, and Robert Bowers, who killed 12 elderly Jews at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania exactly six months before Saturday's atrocity.

Earnest's statement was posted to 8chan, the same message board that carried the 74-page manifesto by Tarrant. Tarrant's name is cited 10 times in the seven-page screed, in which Earnest declares it was the New Zealand massacre that triggered his own decision to act.

Like Tarrant, Earnest links his hatred of Jews to his abhorrence of socialism, a connection that is the hallmark of fascist ideology and demonstrates its class function—to mobilize deranged and desperate elements against the working class. Earnest's online statement specifically condemns Jews "for their role in cultural Marxism and communism." He combines this with a diatribe against Arabs, blacks and Hispanics.

It is, of course, no coincidence that hatred of immigrants and fear of socialism are the two principal themes of Trump's reelection campaign. Earnest, like Tarrant and Bowers, claims to scorn Trump for his Jewish son-in-law and because he is not sufficiently vicious in his efforts to promote white supremacy and destroy socialism. But he nonetheless is the product of the same social and political process that brought Trump into the White House.

Despite the media portrayal of Islamic extremists as the main perpetrators of terrorism, the vast majority of such violence in America in recent years has been carried out by white supremacists, who have targeted immigrants, African-Americans and other minorities, as well as Jews and Muslims.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, anti-Semitic incidents have been rising since 2013, with the biggest increase ever recorded during 2018, the first full year of the Trump presidency, when the total number rose 57 percent to 1,986. There were 163 bomb threats, 852 other acts of harassment, 952 cases of

vandalism, and 19 physical assaults, including the bloodiest act of anti-Semitic violence in American history, the attack on the Tree of Life synagogue.

There have been similar attacks prepared against political opponents of Trump, including the mail bombings against prominent Democrats carried out by Trump supporter Cesar Sayoc, and the plans by Coast Guard officer Christopher Hasson to assassinate selected Democrats, including Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other members of the Democratic Socialists of America. Hasson was ruled eligible for release on bail last week by a Maryland judge.

In carrying out attacks such as the assault on Chabad of Poway, fascists like Earnest demonstrate their political isolation. They are committing crimes that replicate those of Hitler and his storm troopers, but they lack popular support. Their actions are, however, symptoms of a serious danger that working people must not ignore.

The deliberate promotion of far-right and fascistic forces by the ruling classes and traditional bourgeois parties the world over is a response to the growth of working-class struggle and the increasing interest in socialism among workers and young people internationally.

Trump is not a political aberration, but rather the expression in American political life of an international process. In country after country, from the Philippines to India to Brazil, right-wing presidents and prime ministers are encouraging death squads or glorifying military atrocities against the working class. Openly fascist tendencies are reviving in Europe. The Francoite Vox party won over 10 percent in the Spanish elections over the weekend.

The Italian government is under the political control of Matteo Salvini, an open admirer of Mussolini who has been embraced by Trump's former top political strategist, Steve Bannon. Even during a recent trip to Israel, Salvini refused to specifically condemn Mussolini and fascism. In Germany itself, neo-Nazi forces are now playing a major political role, with the elevation of the Alternative for Germany as the official opposition party, setting the tone for the anti-immigrant chauvinism of the entire political establishment.

Such forces are growing because there is no outlet within any section of the political establishment for the

immense anger and militancy of the working class to find expression. In the US, the Democratic Party plays the key role by working to divert and derail popular opposition to Trump's pro-corporate, anti-immigrant and militarist policies. It agrees with Trump's program of social counterrevolution at home and opposes him on the right-wing basis that he is too soft on Russia and insufficiently aggressive in conducting the US wars in the Middle East.

The fight against fascism is inseparable from the fight to mobilize the working class against capitalism and for socialism. This underscores the significance of the meetings the Socialist Equality Party has just held in the United States featuring Christoph Vandreier, a leader of the German section of the ICFI and author of the new book, *Why Are They Back?*, detailing the role of the state, the media and academia in promoting the growth of the German neo-Nazis.

These vital historical lessons will be at the center of the May Day Rally of the International Committee to be held May 4, with participation by speakers and supporters of the ICFI around the world. To attend the rally, register here.



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