

Suspect arrested in subway shooting in Brooklyn was emotionally troubled

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The man suspected of having carried out the shooting on a subway in Brooklyn on Tuesday morning in which 29 people were injured, including 10 with gunshot wounds, but none killed, was apprehended by New York police without resistance in Manhattan early Wednesday afternoon.

The alleged attacker is 62-year-old Frank R. James. Initially identified as a “person of interest,” his identity was determined based on surveillance video in which he was seen at various locations in the vicinity of the attack and the recovery of a van he had rented in Philadelphia which was found some distance from the scene of the attack. Some reports indicate that James himself called the police to tell them where he was, others say he was identified by passersby based on widely circulated photos.

James is reportedly facing multiple charges, including a federal charge for a terroristic attack on mass transit.

Information so far reported indicates that James is a troubled individual, who had been arrested nine times between 1984 and 1998 on charges ranging from burglary, possession of burglar tools, and criminal sexual acts according to New York police, but no further information is currently available. Reports also indicate three arrests in New Jersey for trespass, larceny and disorderly conduct, in 1991, 1992 and 2007, respectively. Reports also indicate that he had made what are characterized as “terroristic threats” in New Jersey.

Individuals who knew him describe him as a loner. He has been estranged from his family for three years, according to his sister. She told the *New York Post* that he moved frequently and that she did not know how he made a living. In addition to New York, he has also lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Some neighbors described him as quiet and

polite. Others report strange and hostile behavior.

In recent years, a series of social media posts and YouTube videos that have been uncovered seem to indicate a deteriorating mental state. He reportedly placed blame for his condition on his father and on New York Mayor Eric Adams. The videos include rants about homeless people in the subway, gun violence and accusing outreach workers of being “homosexual predators.” He also expressed rage over the war in Ukraine, predicting that it would lead to a race war to wipe out black people.

Despite the clear indication that James was a troubled individual who was acting erratically as a result of his illness, Tuesday’s incident was immediately seized on to ramp up the right-wing trope that gun violence can only be controlled by a massive deployment of police and tightening of law enforcement aimed at affecting a substantial increase in incarceration.

Immediately following the attack, Mayor Adams, a Democrat and retired police captain, launched a media blitz to promote the law-and-order program on which he based his election campaign, announcing that he would double the number of New York Police Department (NYPD) officers in the subway. He attributed the increase in gun violence, which has occurred in many places across the country, to the proliferation of guns, as if the guns themselves are causing the violence. He stated on NY1, that the incident in Brooklyn “really elevates the conversation” regarding guns. “This is terror,” he said, “someone attempted to terrorize our system.”

Adams also referred to issues that have been part of the right-wing push to increase police and judicial repression against the working class that were recently enacted as part of the new state budget. These include increasing the imposition of cash bail, resulting in the

lengthy pretrial incarceration of low-income individuals and reducing the rights of defendants to obtain the evidence against them. In a news conference shortly after the attack, Adams blamed a “bottleneck” in the courts that has persisted throughout the pandemic for slowing the prosecution of defendants and alleged that the system was too lenient on defendants. “We witness what I call a revolving door criminal justice system, we’re treating people who have known to participate in criminal acts which are still on our streets...”

The characterization of Tuesday’s attack as an act of terrorism that must be addressed with increased police repression throughout the city was echoed in the press.

An opinion piece in the right-wing, Rupert Murdoch-owned *New York Post*, titled “Brooklyn subway terror is a tragic reminder of our leaders’ failures,” stated, “Tuesday’s massacre was, in more ways than one, a perfect example of how far the city has slipped over the past two years.” The writer went on to blame the attack and other violent incidents on “the failures of their leaders to stem the bleeding.” Notably, the piece describes the increase in violent crime as having occurred “over the past two years” without once identifying this as the span of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While conceding that the motives for the attack remain unclear, the *Post* writer speculates that it may have been a “hate crime.” He goes on to blame the increase in violent crime “to the leniency of the state’s criminal-justice laws, especially the hotly contested bail reform, such offenders cycle on and off the street, with New Yorkers facing ever-escalating crimes while activist district attorneys turn a blind eye.”

As the WSWS has previously reported, both politicians and the press have repeatedly alluded to the fact that violent crime has increased markedly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has occurred regardless of other factors, such as New York state’s 2019 bail reform. Nevertheless, despite the glaringly obvious relationship between the impact of the pandemic and the increase in social tensions resulting in some cases in an uptick in crime, this relationship is belittled or ignored entirely. Rather, the emphasis is placed on increasing repression as the only “solution” to this problem.

Based on what is known so far, it appears that James was not motivated based on any specific political

ideology or overt agenda of any kind, contrary to what is being promoted in the media. Rather, his actions were the result of a severely troubled mental state.

In a rational society, his condition would have been identified and assistance provided. Instead, however, the diseased state of capitalist society, exacerbated by the uncontrolled pandemic, has created conditions of severe economic desperation and social dislocation. The marked increase in opioid overdose deaths, which are correctly characterized as “deaths of despair” and the sharp decline in life expectancy are symptoms of this intensifying crisis.

The effort by the capitalist elite and its political and media apologists to use Tuesday’s shooting to justify increasing repression must be seen for what it is—the desperate act of a ruling class in mortal fear of losing control and willing to use any and all means to defend itself. There is no solution to this rapidly deteriorating situation within the bounds of capitalism.



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