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USA

Another Attempt to Assassinate Trump Could Put the Left in Danger

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Cole Tomas Allen, a 31-year-old man from Torrance, California, raced through a Secret Service checkpoint in an attempt to attack President Donald Trump, members of his cabinet, and leaders of Congress, all gathered at the White House Correspondents Dinner on April 26 at the Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. Agent succeeded in stopping him before he entered the ballroom where dinner was being served. Allen was armed with a pistol, a shotgun, and knives.

Allen is a college graduate with a B.A. in engineering from the California Institute of Technology and an M.A. in computer science from California State University in Dominguez Hills who worked as a tutor. Max Harris, a high school student who was tutored by Allen, described him as a “completely average guy.” The tutoring organization that he worked for named him “teacher of the month” and commented on what a “gentle” person he was.

In notes that he sent to friends and relatives shortly before his attempt on Trump and others, Allen wrote, “I am a citizen of the United States of America. What my representatives do reflects on me. And I am no longer willing to permit a pedophile, rapist, and traitor to coat my hands with his crimes.” Allen, describing himself as a, “half-black, half-white person,” expressed his opposition to Trump’s immigration policy and foreign policy. Apparently motivated by his own Christian faith, Allen expressed his contempt for the hypocrisy that carried out such policies in the name of Christianity.

Cole seems to have been an enraged liberal rather than a leftist. In the 2024 presidential election, he made a \$25 donation to a Democratic Party political action committee supporting Kamala Harris, according to federal campaign finance records. He also belonged to a local activist network called The Wide Awakes, taking its name from an abolitionist group of 1860. Allen is also reported to have attended a No Kings protest against the Trump administration. Still, his assassination attempt could cause problems for socialist and anarchist groups, given that Trump routinely describes his opponents as “lunatic leftists.”

Those of us in the Marxist, democratic socialist left oppose individual acts of violence and terrorism. We work to organize progressive social movements against racism and sexism and to build working class organizations to fight for a better life for all. We know from history and from our own experience, that when we build powerful social movements that threaten the powers-that-be, that we may face violent repression and have to defend ourselves. Or if in an election we win a majority and threaten to take power, we may someday have to fight to defend our victory.

When someone like Allen decides to use violence to kill the country’s ruling group, a handful of people that oppresses and exploits so many, that engages in foreign wars taking the lives of tens of thousands, and through its economic policies threatens our environment and our climate, we understand how he feels. But such individual acts of violence—that almost always hurt innocents—cannot change the system and they threaten to provoke repression against all of us working to construct a better world.

The most famous example in U.S. history is the Red Scare of the 1920s that resulted from anarchists sending 36 bombs to businessmen and politicians in April and May of 1919. In response, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer launched a series of raids in 1919 and early 1920, arresting thousands of suspected Communists, Socialists, and anarchists. The raids particularly targeted immigrants from Eastern Europe and Italy. Many thousands arrested and hundreds deported, often held without warrants or legal counsel. The anarchist movement was crushed.

We don’t need individual violent attacks; we need to build mass movements from below.

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