

Planned Parenthood shooter motivated by right-wing smear campaign

By Tom Carter
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As details emerge of Friday's lethal assault on a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the killer, Robert Lewis Dear, has been linked to the right-wing smear campaign against the organization, which provides health care, including abortion services, to nearly five million women.

Wearing a trench coat and wielding an assault rifle, Dear murdered two victims who were seated in the packed waiting area, killed a university police officer who was dispatched to the scene and hit a total of nine other people with gunfire.

After he was persuaded to surrender after a five-hour standoff, he gave what has been described as a "rambling" interview to police detectives. During this interview, he allegedly made the statement, "No more baby parts."

The shooter's reference to "baby parts" aligns him with the ultra-right smear campaign against Planned Parenthood that has been under way since the summer of this year. The clinic in question has been the site of regular anti-abortion protests, with as many as 300 people demonstrating there on August 22, with regular picketing to harass women entering the building.

No Planned Parenthood staff members were killed in the November 27 attack, thanks to safety precautions implemented by the organization. Quick-thinking personnel followed their training, locked themselves inside clinic rooms and switched their phones to silent mode to avoid being detected by the attacker.

The ongoing campaign against Planned Parenthood focused on a number of doctored videos produced by a well-funded anti-abortion group called the Center for Medical Progress. The videos purport to show members of the organization discussing the sale of "baby parts" for profit.

A wide section of the political establishment joined in this opportunity to denounce Planned Parenthood,

initially including Hillary Clinton, and a virulent campaign was mounted in the Republican-controlled Congress to reduce or cut off the organization's services.

Planned Parenthood provides reproductive health services to nearly five million women each year, including birth control, abortions, testing for sexually transmitted diseases, breast exams and counseling. For many poor and working class women and their families, Planned Parenthood is the only accessible and affordable provider of these services. The campaign against the organization makes use of religious prejudice against abortion as a cover for undermining working people's medical and social services.

In September, Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards was summoned to Washington for a five-hour interrogation by congressional Republicans, who together with the Republican presidential candidates used the opportunity to grandstand and compete with each other to see who could make the most bloodcurdling denunciations of the organization.

In September, Republican presidential candidate Carly Fiorina claimed during a primary debate that there were videos that showed "a fully formed fetus on the table, its heart beating, its legs kicking, while someone says, 'We have to keep it alive to harvest its brain.'" The fact that none of this ever happened did not prevent the multimillionaire former CEO from emphatically insisting that it was true.

These poisonous conceptions apparently made their way into the disturbed mind of Robert Lewis Dear, who decided to take matters into his own hands. The *Denver Post* reported that Dear had a reputation for being combative and "spouting off politically." One neighbor reported that Dear had tried to hand him a right-wing leaflet within minutes of being introduced.

A small businessman who spent most of his life in rural North Carolina, Dear moved recently to the Colorado

Springs area, a hotbed of the ultra-right, headquarters of Focus on the Family and more than 100 other Christian fundamentalist groups, as well as the site of the United States Air Force Academy and five military bases.

While it was Dear who pulled the trigger, moral responsibility for the attacks rests with those who have sought to pollute public consciousness with lies and religious bigotry for their own ends.

In the first 48 hours after the attack, only a handful of the 14 Republican presidential candidates deplored the attack—always without mentioning Planned Parenthood as the target of the violence, and usually only when pressed for a response by the media. They invariably dismissed the attacker as mentally ill rather than politically motivated, as though the two were diametrically opposed.

However, an unnamed Colorado Springs law enforcement official, in a widely reported statement to reporters, called the attacks “definitely politically motivated.” Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers, Republican and former state attorney general, called the attack an example of “domestic terrorism.”

Vicki Cowart, president of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, released a statement following the shooting that placed responsibility for the attacks on those who have been unjustly persecuting the organization: “We’ve seen an alarming increase in hateful rhetoric and smear campaigns against abortion providers and patients over the last few months. That environment breeds acts of violence.”

In a televised interview, Fiorina responded to Cowart’s statement by denouncing any efforts to link the attack to anti-abortion rhetoric as “typical left-wing tactics.” Fiorina went on to contradict herself by implying that the murderer was, in fact, an anti-abortion “protester.” She stated, “Any protesters should always be peaceful. Whether it’s Black Lives Matter or pro-life protesters.”

“This is so typical of the left, to immediately begin demonizing the messenger because they don’t agree with the message,” she added somewhat incoherently, implying that she agrees with the murderer’s “message.”

Against this backdrop, President Obama’s official statement regarding the shooting was both perfunctory and politically empty. The president did not even bother to appear before cameras, as he has done following previous shootings in Oregon and South Carolina, merely releasing a written statement. Obama’s statement was formulated entirely in terms of an appeal for stricter gun control laws, while deploring the fact that the shooting took place so near to the Thanksgiving holiday.

Obama has spent his presidency cowering before the religious right on the subject of reproductive health care, so it is no surprise that he is unwilling and unable to discuss the political motive behind the Colorado Springs attack.

In 2012, Obama retreated before the Catholic Church and various Christian-affiliated hospitals, exempting them from the provisions of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) that would have required employers to pay for birth control coverage for their employees. Instead of insisting on the separation of church and state and on the universal application of the law, Obama changed the regulations to accommodate the religious right.

Again, in oral arguments in the Supreme Court in March 2014, the Obama administration solicitor general expressly refused to defend Obamacare on the grounds of the separation of church and state, paving the way for the infamous *Hobby Lobby* decision granting corporations the right to opt out of laws in conflict with their supposed moral views.

Obama’s cowardly response to the Colorado Springs attack further underscores the fact that no significant faction of the bourgeois political establishment is capable of principled opposition to ultra-right violence.

The National Abortion Federation reports that since 1977, when anti-abortion fanatics began launching physical attacks on clinics and personnel, eight doctors and staff members have been killed. There have also been 17 attempted murders, 186 arson attacks and thousands of other crimes targeting abortion clinics.

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