

PSC STATEMENT ON THE TREE OF LIFE MASS MURDER

The members of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY condemn the murder of 11 Jewish congregants in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh on October 27, the deadliest attack ever on Jews in the United States. We also strongly condemn anti-Semitism and racism, which were explicitly named and entwined by the accused mass murderer as his motivation.

We extend our sympathy to the entire Tree of Life community, to the people of Pittsburgh, and to Jews throughout this country and beyond. After a century that witnessed the massive state mobilization of anti-Semitism and the systematic murder of six million Jews, any re-emergence of anti-Semitism must be taken with extreme seriousness—and resisted.

We are also mindful that among the PSC community are members who grew up attending Tree of Life, members who knew some of the victims, members whose parents are Holocaust survivors or who are survivors themselves, as well as members—and students—who have been subjected to anti-Semitism and racism in all of its virulent forms. To our colleagues most directly affected, we extend our solidarity and support.

We are all affected by what happened in Pittsburgh. The attack on Tree of Life occurred during the same week in which two African Americans were murdered in Kentucky by a white gunman who had apparently tried to force his way into a black church for purposes of doing violence to the congregation. It comes after two years in which the rhetoric and policies of President Donald Trump have given new legitimacy to violent expressions of racism, Islamophobia, sexism and homophobia, as well as anti-Semitism and even Nazism.

The alleged murderer himself made the connection between anti-Semitism and other forms of racism when he announced online that he was targeting HIAS, the Jewish immigrant-aid agency, specifically because of its work with Muslim refugees.

But as Holocaust scholar (and CUNY Ph.D.) Michael Rothberg reminds us, “The proximity of the Trump movement’s antisemitism to its virulent anti-black, anti-brown, and anti-immigrant racism as well as its homophobia and sexism creates the opportunity to extend solidarities and create new coalitions.” Mark Hetfield, the president of HIAS, puts it this way: “Now we welcome refugees not because they’re Jewish, but because we’re Jewish.” The compassion of the oppressed for the oppressed, Bertolt Brecht wrote, “is the world’s one hope.”

We in an academic labor union at CUNY have a special role to play in extending solidarities and creating anti-racist coalitions, given the diversity of our student body and the history of fascist and racist attacks on unions. This is a moment to rededicate ourselves to the fight for economic, racial and educational justice and to build a union powerful enough, and compassionate enough, to be part of the fight.

Adopted by the PSC Executive Council, November 1, 2018