

Governments and media seek to cover up culpability for fascist attack in New Zealand

By James Cogan
19 March 2019

Vigils and other commemorations for the victims of last Friday's fascist terrorist attack on two mosques in Christchurch have been attended by large and emotional audiences across New Zealand, as well as in Australia and numerous other countries.

The atrocity is the worst mass killing in New Zealand's history, and one of the most savage acts of fascist terrorism internationally. Fifty people have lost their lives, while 31 remain in hospital with gunshot injuries, including nine still in intensive care. Many of those murdered were migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan and Palestine who had lived in New Zealand for decades. Others were refugees who had been forced to flee their home countries due to the US-led wars and proxy wars in the Middle East, waged on the false pretext of combating Islamist "terror."

The solidarity events have witnessed an outpouring of impassioned opposition to anti-Muslim xenophobia and condemnation of the extreme right-wing, fascist conceptions of the man who has been charged with the terrorist act, 28-year-old Australian Brenton Tarrant.

More information is emerging to prove that Tarrant was not some "lone wolf," let alone a "madman." For a number of years, he has moved within, and been politically shaped by, the international fascist networks spawned by the almost universal stoking of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hatred by the political establishments and media in Australia and New Zealand, across Europe and in the United States.

Tarrant has travelled extensively across Europe since 2012, as well as visiting Turkey, Pakistan and even North Korea. He participated in extreme right-wing discussions on 8chan, as well as commenting on posts on Facebook and other media. He did not conceal his name or his views.

He claims in his manifesto to have decided to conduct an act of terrorist mass murder while in France and witnessing the defeat of the fascist National Front in the 2017 elections. From November 2018 to January 2019, as he planned Friday's attack, he toured Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Serbia and Croatia, visiting sites of past battles against "Muslim invaders."

The Australian and New Zealand governments continue to insist that Tarrant was "off the radar" of their intelligence agencies, whose size and resources have been vastly expanded since the "war on terror" began in 2001. While the Muslim communities of both countries have been subjected to 18 years of surveillance and numerous police actions, an individual interacting with organisations espousing fanatical right-wing views was purportedly ignored—even after he applied for a gun license at the end of 2017 and this year joined a gun club in New Zealand when he returned to the country.

Tarrant, moreover, did not seek to hide his murderous intentions. Two days before the attack, he posted images on his Twitter account of his semi-automatic weapon with white supremacist slogans dubbed upon it. His fascist manifesto, which specifically named the two mosques he was going to attack, was sent out to dozens of government and media accounts some eight minutes before he initiated the massacre. If he had been under monitoring, the atrocity might have been entirely prevented.

While millions of working people have reacted with shock and anger, the official expression of horror by the political and media establishments in New Zealand, Australia and internationally is, frankly, a cover-up of their culpability in the development of fascist terrorism.

In Australia, successive Liberal-National Coalition and Labor Party governments have presided over 18

years of anti-Muslim hysteria and the enforcement of a brutal and racist policy of preventing predominantly Muslim refugees from claiming asylum in the country on the grounds they could be “terrorists.” The dominant figures within the current Coalition government, including Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, are among those most associated with these policies.

Decades of anti-immigrant xenophobia have given rise to not only racist parties such as One Nation, but myriad right-wing and neo-fascist groupings. This is the toxic political atmosphere in which Tarrant grew up in an Australian regional town, the kind of location where the extreme right has particularly concentrated its efforts to recruit support.

In New Zealand, the Labour Party-NZ First coalition government headed by Jacinda Ardern came to power on an explicit program of slashing immigration, on the false grounds it was responsible for housing and other social problems. NZ First leader Winston Peters, the deputy prime minister and foreign minister, is an open racist, on record as sowing xenophobia against Muslim, African and Chinese migrants. The extreme right elements in New Zealand praise Peters as their best spokesperson in parliament.

The reality is that anti-immigrant and nationalist demagoguery has been used by the capitalist ruling class internationally to try to divide the working class and scapegoat migrants for the immense and ever-widening social inequality and dysfunction of essential services. The Trump administration’s blatantly racist “America First” policies are just a particularly crude expression of a universal tendency. Ultra-right parties are now part of numerous governments in Europe or form the main official opposition, as in France and Germany.

Fascism is spawned by the crisis and failure of capitalism. Its fundamental role for the capitalist class is to block and break up an independent and unified socialist movement of the working class developing for revolutionary social and political change.

Tarrant spelt this out clearly in his manifesto, which is influenced by the views of an entire fascist milieu. He advocated provoking race-based violence across the United States, Europe and other countries, as it would provide the pretext for the establishment of military dictatorships and genocidal policies against socialists,

immigrants and religious minorities such as Muslims and Jews.

Ardern in New Zealand and Morrison in Australia are now demanding that social media platforms do more to censor bulletin boards and postings, and impose stricter controls on the live-streaming of video. Such measures will not be primarily used to block fascist views, but to undermine the democratic rights and struggles of the working class against social inequality and war.

This was what followed the bloodiest fascist terrorist attack: the mass murder of 77 people, mainly left-wing youth, at a Norwegian Labour Party camp in 2011 by Anders Behring Breivik. This has been followed by the open promotion of extreme right-wing propaganda in the establishment media and at the highest levels of the state.

The official advocacy and support for far-right views is above all responsible for the crimes of figures such as Tarrant, and the decision by disorientated layers in various countries to join fascist parties. While such formations are not yet mass movements, the danger they pose should not be underestimated.

The great lesson of the 1920s and the 1930s is that struggle against fascism cannot be entrusted to any wing or party of the capitalist class. It can be successfully waged only by a politically independent movement of the international working class that is consciously fighting to end capitalism and its outmoded nation-state divisions and to establish socialism. The building of such a movement is the urgent task in New Zealand, Australia and around the world.

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