

Fascist terrorists murder 49 in Christchurch, New Zealand

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Forty-nine people were killed and another 48 injured in a horrifying terrorist attack yesterday afternoon on two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch. The attack is by far the largest mass shooting and the most severe act of terrorism in New Zealand's history, and one of the world's worst in the recent period.

Seven people died at Linwood Masjid Mosque and 41 at Masjid Al Noor Mosque next to Hagley Park, near the city centre. Another person died in hospital. It is possible the death toll will rise.

Ordinary people internationally have expressed shock over the attack and sympathy with the victims. Vigils are planned in New Zealand towns and cities on Saturday night and in coming days.

Three people have been arrested in connection with the massacre. Weapons were found near each of the mosques. Police also disarmed two explosive devices found in one vehicle—an indication that further attacks might have been planned. So far, only one man has been named, 28-year-old Australian citizen Brenton Tarrant, who appeared in court today charged with murder.

The attack is a horrific crime, an act of barbarism motivated by racism and extreme right-wing ideology. It is not just a New Zealand event, but is the outcome of the rise of far-right, fascistic networks that have developed around the world, promoted and protected from the highest levels of the state apparatus. Their activities have expanded alongside the rapid escalation of the international class struggle and desperate moves by the ruling elites to suppress opposition by eviscerating basic democratic rights.

Tarrant drew his inspiration from, and had a definite audience among, far-right, anti-immigrant groups internationally. Video footage of the Al Noor Mosque attack was broadcast live on Facebook and YouTube, apparently from a camera mounted on Tarrant's head. The footage, since taken down, shows the gunman driving to the mosque, entering the building and carrying out his cold-blooded and systematic massacre. Defenceless victims, including small children, had little chance of escaping the hail of bullets

from the assault rifle.

Although many details are not yet known, it is clear that this was not a random or “senseless” action. According to a 73-page “manifesto” published by Tarrant online, he spent two years planning the attack after spending some time living in Europe.

Entitled “The Great Replacement,” the manifesto makes clear that Tarrant was a white supremacist and considered himself a “fascist.” The document praised mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who killed dozens of young people and children at a Norwegian Labour Party camp in 2011, motivated by anti-Islamist prejudice. Tarrant claimed to have had “brief contact” with Breivik and to have received his “blessing” for the New Zealand attack.

Just last month, US authorities arrested a Coast Guard Lieutenant, Christopher Paul Hasson, who was plotting to carry out terrorist attacks against socialist groups, Democratic Party politicians and media personalities. Hasson is a neo-Nazi who also proclaims Breivik as his idol.

Tarrant hailed US President Donald Trump as “a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose.” Like Trump, Tarrant described immigrants as “invaders,” stating: “We must crush immigration and deport those invaders already living on our soil.”

The shooter also threatened leftists. A passage headlined “to Antifa/Marxists/Communists” stated: “I want you in my sights. I want your neck under my boot.” On March 12, Tarrant posted numerous photos on Twitter of his assault rifle, covered in written messages, including references to Josué Estébanez, a neo-Nazi who murdered a teenage anarchist in Spain in 2007. Another slogan is “Vienna 1683,” which references the armed repulsion of Ottoman invaders by Austrian militias.

Astonishingly, NZ Police Commissioner Mike Bush claimed that neither New Zealand nor Australian police, or any other agencies, had any prior knowledge of Tarrant or the other people arrested. They were not, apparently, on any extremist “watch lists.” If this is true, it underscores the fact that the state authorities have turned a blind eye to, and are

complicit in, the activities of the far-right networks.

No explanation has been given as to how such an attack could be planned for years without coming to the attention of police. Questions are also being raised about how the attackers acquired their weapons. New Zealand has no gun register and there are 1.3 million legally-owned weapons, in a country of just under 5 million people.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern stated in a press conference on Friday evening that New Zealand was “not chosen for this act of violence because we condone racism, because we are an enclave for extremism. We were chosen for the very fact that we are none of those things. Because we represent diversity, kindness, compassion.”

In fact, the attack took place in a definite domestic and international political context characterised by imperialist violence and increasing nationalism, xenophobia and racism. It follows almost two decades of New Zealand and Australian participation in US-led wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, which have killed more than a million people. Troops from New Zealand and Australia have been implicated in multiple massacres and atrocities against civilians in Afghanistan.

Under deteriorating social conditions, growing inequality and increasing poverty, there has been a definite move to foster the creation of an “alt-right” movement in New Zealand. It is designed to confront the growing radicalisation of the working class and youth.

The atrocity in New Zealand follows not only the mass murder committed by Breivik in Norway, but the murders carried out by fascists at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012 and at a Jewish care home in Overland Park, Kansas in 2014; the 2015 massacre of African-American worshippers in Charleston, South Carolina; the 2016 murder of British Labour politician Jo Cox; the 2017 killing of six people at a mosque in Quebec City, Canada; and the murder in 2018 of 11 Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—to cite only some of the right-wing acts of terrorism.

Echoing the recent assault on British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, NZ Green Party leader James Shaw was attacked in a Wellington street last Thursday by an individual shouting slogans against the United Nations. The assailant may well have been motivated by recent protests by far-right groups against New Zealand signing the UN Migration Compact.

Anti-Islamic sentiment has been deliberately stoked by politicians in Australia and New Zealand. Australia’s extreme right-wing Independent Senator Fraser Anning issued a fascist press release blaming the Christchurch massacre on the victims themselves. He described Muslim immigration as the “real cause” of the attack. Anning

recently attended a rally at St. Kilda Beach organised by prominent Australian neo-Nazis.

At her first press conference on Friday evening, Ardern declared that “there is no place in New Zealand” for purveyors of “hate.” However, Ardern has embraced, and brought into the very centre of her government, the racist and populist NZ First Party, which was founded in the early 1990s on an explicit anti-Asian, anti-immigrant platform.

NZ First, which is a partner in the Labour-led coalition government, is a notorious spreader of anti-Muslim xenophobia. Despite receiving just 7.2 percent of the votes in 2017, NZ First was given the roles of foreign minister, defence minister and deputy prime minister.

Following the June 2017 London terror attacks, NZ First leader Winston Peters demanded in parliament that New Zealand’s “Islamic community” “clean house” by naming potential terrorists in “their own families.” Without producing any evidence of such extremism, Peters denounced the “twisted spirit of inclusiveness” that accommodated “the culture of Damascus” and “Tripoli” in New Zealand. He declared: “We must avoid the same politically correct trap that has allowed such communities apart to form... We must stop the slide as a people, as a culture in the West.”

Last year, NZ First called for a “New Zealand values test” to be administered to new immigrants, clearly a dog whistle aimed against Muslims and Asian migrants. Peters said it would stop migrants who believe “women are cattle and second-class citizens.” Another NZ First member, Roger Melville, declared that people from “Pakistan, Indians and some Asian-type nations” were “forcing their ways on others.”

The Christchurch attack provides a deadly warning about the dangers ahead. An atmosphere of toxic nationalism, militarism and anti-immigrant xenophobia is being whipped up internationally, providing the basis for the re-emergence of fascism as capitalism lurches into its greatest crisis since the 1930s. It must be answered by the building of an international socialist movement, unifying the working class of all countries in the struggle to end capitalism and the fascist reaction it has spawned.



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