

Warnings of New Zealand neo-Nazi attack were ignored

John Braddock, Tom Peters

20 March 2019

Following last Friday's mass killing at two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch, which claimed 50 lives, tens of thousands of ordinary people have attended vigils to show their grief and outrage and to express solidarity with the Muslim community targeted by this horrific act of fascist terrorism.

However, even as the population seeks to come to terms with the slaughter, an operation is underway to divert attention from its real, underlying causes. The political establishment in New Zealand and internationally is seeking to cover up its culpability for stoking anti-Islamic racism and xenophobia to justify imperialist war and divide the working class as it faces deteriorating social conditions, growing inequality and poverty.

The perpetrator of the Christchurch attack, Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian citizen, is being falsely presented as a deranged outsider whose actions could not be predicted in "peaceful" New Zealand. Labour Party Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared after the shooting that "the person who has perpetrated this violence against us is not [us]."

Writing in the pro-Labour Party *Daily Blog*, prominent commentator Chris Trotter echoed Ardern, describing Tarrant as a "lone wolf terrorist" who "took advantage of everything that is good about New Zealand" and who "could not have been stopped." The same basic message has been repeated throughout the media.

In reality, Tarrant is the product of the promotion of extreme nationalism by established political parties and the corporate media internationally, including in New Zealand and Australia.

There is no mention in Trotter's column, or most media coverage, of the fact that the Labour Party and the Greens have for years acted in an alliance with New Zealand First, a blatantly xenophobic and anti-immigrant party, which plays a major role in the present Labour-led coalition government.

Deputy Prime Minister and NZ First leader Winston Peters has repeatedly demonised Muslims and denounced "mass immigration" from Asia in terms not very different from those used in the "manifesto" of the Christchurch shooter. Trotter and the *Daily Blog* have played a particularly foul role in supporting Labour and NZ First's racist scapegoating of Chinese people for the country's social crisis.

Claims that Tarrant acted alone and "could not have been stopped" do not withstand serious scrutiny. Despite official statements that Tarrant was not known to New Zealand or Australian authorities, police and intelligence agencies were warned about the danger of anti-Islamic extremism and turned a blind eye to it.

Yesterday, the minister in charge of the intelligence agencies Andrew Little admitted to the *New Zealand Herald* that the Security Intelligence Service (SIS) only began "explicitly doing work on alt-right stuff" in the middle of 2018 and a plan to tackle right-wing extremism had not been completed at the time of the Christchurch attack. Little did not explain why this intelligence work only began last year.

According to Tarrant's 73-page fascist "manifesto," he spent two years in New Zealand planning his attack and had contact with nationalist groups throughout the world. He claimed to have received a "blessing" for the massacre from Anders Behring Breivik, the anti-Muslim terrorist who killed 77 people in Norway in 2011. It is also highly possible that Tarrant had contact with neo-Nazis in New Zealand. An unnamed 18-year-old is currently in custody charged with, between March 8 and 15, posting a photo of the Deans Avenue mosque with the words "Target Identified," and messages inciting extreme violence.

Notwithstanding propaganda from Trotter and others that "New Zealand is a good place" and the Christchurch massacre was an anomaly, there have in fact been several previous fascist attacks. In 1989, 22-year-old Wayne

Motz was killed in Christchurch's Cathedral Square by a neo-Nazi skinhead who then shot himself. In 2003 two skinheads brutally murdered Korean backpacker Jae Hyeon Kim on the West Coast of the South Island.

The question must be raised: has the far-right been allowed to operate free from interference because it enjoys sympathy and connections with the police and intelligence agencies in Australia and New Zealand?

Internationally, there are close ties between the state apparatus and fascist organisations, including in Germany, where the neo-Nazi Alternative for Germany is the main opposition party in parliament. US President Donald Trump, whom Tarrant viewed as a “symbol of white renewal,” has brought fascist advisors into the White House and sought to create an extreme anti-immigrant base in border security agencies, the police and the military.

Anjum Rahman, a spokesperson for the NZ Islamic Womens' Council, told Radio NZ that her organisation repeatedly warned the intelligence agencies about the rise in anti-Islamic racism and threats. In March 2016, the Masjid Al-Noor mosque, at the centre of Friday's massacre, was delivered boxes of pigs' heads by Hitler-saluting men who boasted: “Bring on the cull.” The chief perpetrator, insulation business owner Philip Arps, posted a video on social media declaring that the boxes should have contained “f***ing molotovs.”

Rahman said in 2016 and 2017 “we told [the SIS] about our concerns over the rise of vitriol and the rise of the alt-right in New Zealand. We asked them what resources were being put in to monitoring alt-right groups.” In May 2018, the Council asked why security agencies were spending “so much on surveilling our community” but not on preventing violence.

New Zealand is part of the US-led “Five Eyes” surveillance network, which spies on millions of people throughout the world, including New Zealand citizens. People travelling to the Middle East have been targeted purportedly because they might be joining ISIS. Muslims have reported being routinely searched and made to feel like criminals when entering and leaving New Zealand.

Tarrant apparently faced no such obstacles during his extensive international travels. Since 2012, he visited Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, France, the UK, Spain, Turkey, Israel, Pakistan and even North Korea. Turkish agencies revealed on Monday they suspect the gunman, who travelled the world while having no apparent job, may have been supported by a “well resourced” organisation.

Police did not prevent Tarrant from amassing multiple firearms. He obtained a gun licence in November 2017 after passing a police background check and joined the Bruce Rifle Club near Dunedin. A former soldier, Pete Breidahl, said he warned police in late 2017 about the toxic culture at the club, describing it as the “perfect breeding ground” for a mass shooting.

Breidahl told *Newshub* that people at the club were “ranting and raving” that the military would be deployed on Dunedin streets because of Muslim terrorist attacks, and that “too many Muslims were coming here.” He says he saw members with the Confederate flag and another person informed him that he had visited a club member's house and saw “German SS uniforms.” Briedahl said the police officer he spoke to dismissed his concerns, saying “don't worry about them, it's all good.”

The government has announced that an inquiry will be held into the circumstances surrounding the Christchurch massacre. This exercise is destined to be a whitewash. Its role will be to cover up the complicit role of the state agencies and to obscure the fact that governments, including the Labour-NZ First-Greens coalition, have promoted many of the same nationalist and anti-immigrant policies of the far-right.

While fascism is not yet a mass movement, the danger it poses cannot be ignored. Fascism is the tool used by the ruling class to divide and crush working-class opposition to austerity and war. It cannot be opposed by allowing governments to censor the internet and impose other police-state measures, which will be used primarily against the working class and the left. The urgent lesson of the 1920s and 1930s is that fascism can only be defeated by a movement of the working class, united across borders and armed with a socialist program to abolish capitalism.



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