

After far-right terror attack, New York Times glorifies New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

Tom Peters
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Following the March 15 terrorist attack by Australian fascist Brenton Tarrant, who killed 50 people in two Christchurch mosques motivated by hatred of immigrants and Muslims, the political establishment and media in New Zealand, Australia, the US and Europe have sought to wash their hands of any responsibility for the massacre.

The gunman is being falsely presented as someone who acted alone and whose extremism had nothing to do with the right-wing, anti-immigrant policies advocated for decades by the media and capitalist politicians. Seeking to cover its tracks, New Zealand's opposition National Party removed a link from its website to a petition opposing the recent UN Migration agreement. Media outlets such as Newstalk ZB have reportedly been removing articles from website archives demonising Muslims. The media and government are largely blaming the tragedy on social media and demanding a crackdown on the ability to upload live videos.

A major element of the campaign to divert attention from the real causes of the terrorist attack is the near-universal glorification of NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's "inspirational" leadership. A nationalist personality cult is being promoted around Ardern in order to drown out any discussion of the role played by the Labour Party, and every party in parliament, in promoting anti-immigrant xenophobia to divide the working class and deflect blame for the social crisis created by capitalism.

On Tuesday the *New York Times*, the US newspaper of record, aligned with the Democrats, published an article by Sushil Aaron, "Why Jacinda Ardern Matters," which declared that Ardern's "moral clarity is inspiring the world." New Zealand's prime minister, Aaron declared, "is emerging as the definitive progressive antithesis to the crowded field of right-wing strongmen like President Trump, Viktor Orban of Hungary and Narendra Modi of India, whose careers thrive on illiberal, anti-Muslim rhetoric."

As evidence, Aaron pointed to Ardern's expressions of

sympathy at vigils and meetings with victims' families. He also cited the prime minister's suggestion that Trump should show "sympathy and love for all Muslim communities." This lame comment is being falsely depicted as a major rebuke to Trump, a fascistic figure who has deliberately stoked anti-Muslim bigotry and was seen by the Christchurch terrorist as a "symbol of white renewal."

The *Times* article largely resembles a travel advertisement for New Zealand, depicting the country as a liberal paradise with "a national culture unlike any other in Europe or the Americas," beautiful scenery, parks, libraries and "modest" healthcare and education costs.

Outrageously, Aaron claims that migrants face only "subtle forms of exclusion" in New Zealand and "there is a vibrant political debate on immigration and about the need to import skilled labor without provoking domestic tensions—all conducted without rancor or vitriol."

The entire article is a pack of lies and distortions. Like similar articles in the UK *Guardian* and the New Zealand and Australian media, the *New York Times* does not mention the fact that the Labour Party has for years worked in an alliance with the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, the main promoter of anti-immigrant, anti-Chinese and anti-Muslim demagoguery.

Labour has adopted NZ First's policies, including demands for major reductions in immigration. As in Europe, India and the US, right-wing nationalists have been actively promoted within New Zealand and are now at the centre of the government.

The Labour Party and the Greens contested the 2014 and 2017 elections in an alliance with NZ First and the three parties formed a coalition government in October 2017. Far from being the antithesis of the Trump administration, as the *Times* would have it, the Labour-NZ First-Greens coalition deal was backed by Washington. Following the election, Trump's appointed ambassador Scott Brown publicly criticised the previous National Party government for its

reluctance to fully endorse Trump's threats against North Korea, and made clear that the next government should align more strongly with the US build-up to war against China.

NZ First, which only received 7.2 percent of the votes, was given unprecedented power by Ardern. Its leader Winston Peters was made foreign minister and deputy prime minister. NZ First's Ron Mark became the defence minister.

The Ardern government significantly strengthened the alliance with the US. Its 2018 defence policy statement adopted the Trump administration's description of Russia and China as the main "threats" to global stability. Peters has called on the US to increase its military presence in the Pacific to push back against China, while supporting a media-led witch-hunt against Chinese "influence" in New Zealand.

Peters told the media on Tuesday that the Christchurch atrocity was "committed by a person who is not a New Zealander, is utterly contrary to our core beliefs." On the same day, however, he refused to retract his past anti-Muslim statements, including a 2005 speech in which he said "New Zealand has never been a nation of Islamic immigrants," and accused moderate Muslims of working "hand and glove" with "militants" who threatened "the Christian faith." Labour and the Greens made no criticism of Peters' stance.

In June 2016, after Peters delivered another chauvinist rant accusing the Islamic community of harbouring "extremists," Green and Labour MPs hypocritically denounced his statements as "shameful" and "disgraceful." At the same time, however, Greens leader James Shaw told TVNZ: "I feel very comfortable with the idea that we may end up working with NZ First" in government.

The climate of anti-Muslim racism which helped produce the fascist attack in Christchurch has been deliberately created to justify the US-led "war on terror," which successive Australian and New Zealand governments have supported over the past two decades. The Ardern government has kept soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they have been implicated in massacres of civilians. More than a million people have died in these brutal imperialist wars.

The Labour Party has always used nationalism and anti-immigrant policies to divide the working class. Following the 2008 financial crash, Labour supported the then-National Party government's austerity measures, which led to soaring social inequality, and repeatedly sought to divert blame onto immigrants.

In 2015, Labour notoriously scapegoated people with "Chinese sounding names" for New Zealand's lack of affordable housing, caused by rampant speculation. The Ardern government banned foreigners from buying houses. It also restricted the ability of foreign students to work in

New Zealand, after NZ First and the trade unions attacked them for "taking" jobs from "Kiwi workers."

Then-Labour leader Andrew Little declared in 2017 it was too "easy [for employers] to get somebody from overseas and keep locals out of work." Such nationalist rhetoric failed to boost the party's support in the working class, where it is widely seen as a party of war and big business, just like National. The working class is increasingly international in character, with one in four New Zealand residents born overseas.

Ardern was made leader just two months before the 2017 election in a desperate bid to save the party from a disastrous defeat. Despite a media campaign to promote her as progressive, based on her youth and her gender, Labour only received 36 percent of the votes and could only form a government with NZ First and the Greens.

Since then, Ardern has been glorified in the international media, including for having a baby while in office, which was ludicrously presented as a major step forward for "women workers." A September 8, 2018 article in the *New York Times* described Ardern's victory as a "preview of what could be possible" in the US, "where a stampede of women—including young mothers—is seeking office in 2018." The right-wing character of such identity politics, central to the Democratic Party, is revealed in New Zealand, where the purpose of Ardern's feminism is to provide a progressive façade to a pro-war, anti-working class government.

The posturing of Ardern and the Labour Party as opponents of anti-Muslim xenophobia and racism is an attempt to cover up the fact that every establishment party in New Zealand, Australia, Europe and the US has helped to create the foul political atmosphere in which fascists and right-wing nationalists have grown. Fascism can only be defeated by the international working class, united in a socialist struggle against the capitalist system, which is the source of austerity, nationalism and imperialist war.



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