

Australian PM seeks to cover up political roots of fascist attack in New Zealand

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Over the past week, millions of Australians have sought, via vigils, petitions and social media posts, to voice their revulsion and outrage at the massacre of 50 Muslims at two New Zealand mosques.

Adding to the shock and concern is that this terrible crime, one of the worst acts of fascist violence since World War II, was carried out by a young man, Brenton Tarrant, 28, who was born and bred in Australia.

By contrast, while feigning sympathy for the victims, the entire political and media establishment is desperately denying any responsibility for creating the social conditions and political climate for such atrocities.

In a speech last Monday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison called for an end to “mindless tribalism.” While appealing for an end to “hate, blame and contempt,” his sole purpose was to insist that there was no link between the Christchurch attack and Australia’s notorious record of demonising and incarcerating refugees.

Morrison claimed that “legitimate policy debates” about “border policy” and slashing the migration intake were being hijacked by “tribalists” of both “the left and the right.” Tarrant had “rightly been denounced” for exploiting concerns about immigration to justify a mass killing, but “equally” anyone must be denounced if they seek to connect government policy to “racial hatred.”

This attempt to wall off refugee and immigration policy from the murders committed by a self-proclaimed “ethno-nationalist” is utter hypocrisy. There are palpable connections between Tarrant and the bipartisan regime of “stopping the boats,” detaining asylum seekers indefinitely and vilifying Muslims, which has been pursued for decades by successive Australian governments, Liberal-National Coalition and

Labor alike.

Australia’s anti-refugee “model” has long been hailed by the far-right networks to which Tarrant proclaimed allegiance in his manifesto, railing against “Muslim invaders.” Among the most avid admirers of Australia’s brutal policy have been the far-right Donald Trump and the leaders of fascistic parties across Europe, including the Lega’s Matteo Salvini, who is now Italy’s deputy prime minister, Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz, whose People’s Party attacks Muslims and refugees, and the neo-fascist French National Rally’s Marine Le Pen.

Tarrant himself was born in 1991, the year that the Hawke-Keating Labor government became the first in the world to mandatorily detain all asylum seekers, a regime now being replicated by the Trump administration and governments all over Europe. The same government, working hand-in-glove with the trade unions, unleashed the global program of deregulation and privatisation that demolished the jobs and conditions of workers across Australia, including in regional towns, such as Grafton, where Tarrant grew up. Labor’s condemnation of refugees as “queue jumpers” was part of a conscious policy to divert and divide the working class as this social assault escalated.

In the same year, the Labor government also rushed to join the US in its first invasion of Iraq, initiating decades of militarism aimed at reasserting the global hegemony of American capitalism. Australian troops have been on the frontline of every bloody US war since.

That is the political climate that shaped Tarrant’s views. For three decades, Australian governments, Coalition and Labor alike, have stoked nationalism, militarism and xenophobia to divert the rising discontent produced by falling real wages, the

destruction of full-time jobs and decaying public services and infrastructure.

Morrison himself has been in the forefront of anti-Muslim scapegoating. As immigration minister from 2013 to 2015, he led the military-based “Operation Sovereign Borders” to repel refugee boats and reinforce the previous Labor government’s policy of incarcerating asylum seekers, many of whom have fled the US-led wars in the Middle East.

An early fore-warning of this role came in 2010. According to well-substantiated media reports, Morrison urged a Coalition shadow cabinet meeting to whip up concerns about “Muslim immigration” as a political weapon. This week, he branded these reports “a disgraceful smear and an appalling lie,” but later admitted he had raised the issue in 2010, supposedly to “address” but not “exploit” alleged public concerns about Muslims.

Just days after the Christchurch attack, Morrison unveiled a 15 percent cut to the country’s annual migration intake, to 160,000, and a policy to force new arrivals to live and work in rural areas for three years, as a source of cheap labour, in order to qualify for permanent residency. Labor Party leader Bill Shorten immediately agreed with the announcement.

In a misguided attempt to voice their political disgust, more than 1.3 million people this week signed an on-line petition—by far the largest in Australian history—to demand the expulsion from parliament of the openly racist Senator Fraser Anning. He had declared that Muslim migration was “the real cause of bloodshed on New Zealand streets.”

This popular outrage, while justified, is misdirected. Anning simply gave unvarnished expression to the poisonous fumes that saturate the parliament itself. In fact, Anning, who entered parliament as a nominee of Senator Pauline Hanson’s anti-immigrant One Nation party, espouses the “White Australia” policy on which the Labor Party and the trade unions were founded in the 1890s.

Moreover, the climate of anti-Muslim racism also has been deliberately fomented to justify the US-led “war on terror” in the resource-rich and strategic Middle East, which successive Australian governments, both Coalition and Labor-led, have supported since 2001.

The removal of an MP for his views would set an anti-democratic precedent to be used against left-wing

dissent, as Morrison’s targeting of the “left” indicates. The only MP ever expelled from the national parliament, Hugh Mahon, was removed in 1920 for “seditious and disloyal utterances at a public meeting,” at which he condemned British repression in Ireland and called for a republic.

Many questions remain about how Tarrant and his co-thinkers in Australia, New Zealand and Europe were able to prepare his mass murder, supposedly without being detected by the police and intelligence agencies. Nevertheless, the official response has been to exonerate these political surveillance forces and hand them expanded resources and powers.

Morrison began by allocating another \$55 million for the installation of CCTV cameras and other security systems. Backed by Shorten, he demanded that social media platforms do more to censor postings, and called for this issue to be placed on the agenda of this year’s G20 summit in Japan. Such measures will not primarily be used to block fascist views, but to undermine democratic rights and the struggles of the working class against social inequality and war.

While the events in New Zealand have come as a shock to many people, the record shows that the evolution of an Australian fascist is hardly accidental. The Australian ruling elite has long been in the vanguard of resorting to anti-immigrant and nationalist demagoguery to try to divert and divide the working class.

Tarrant’s callous murder of Muslims marks a new stage. The capitalist ruling class internationally, from the Trump administration to the ultra-right governments and parties in Europe, is increasingly promoting fascistic forces to suppress the emerging eruption of working-class struggle against the escalating inequality, social crisis and threat of war.



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