

New Zealand fascist killer appears in court

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Accused mass murderer Brenton Tarrant made his second court appearance in New Zealand on Friday following the terrorist attack at two Christchurch mosques on March 15. He faces 50 murder charges and 39 counts of attempted murder. A police statement said other charges are still being considered.

The 28-year-old fascist appeared by audio-visual link in the High Court at Christchurch from Auckland's high security Paremoremo prison where he is being held in isolation. Media applications to film, take photos and record the accused in court were declined by Justice Cameron Mander.

Tarrant was not required to enter a plea at last Friday's session, some of which was held in closed chambers. Mander ordered two health assessors' reports, which will determine whether he is mentally fit to plead to the charges. Although the accused had initially signalled he would represent himself, two Auckland lawyers have now accepted instructions to act as his counsel. He will reappear in court on June 14.

All aspects of the forthcoming trial will be tightly controlled. Significantly, Tarrant does not yet face any charges relating to terrorism laws. To prove terrorism it is necessary to prove political motivation, which would involve discussion of Tarrant's 74-page fascist "manifesto" and raise many uncomfortable questions.

The Labour-led government, and the political establishment as a whole, is desperately seeking to prevent any discussion of the political motivations for the slaughter. The chief censor, David Shanks last month banned Tarrant's document under the Films, Video and Publications Classification Act. Possession of the manifesto carries a maximum prison sentence of 10 years and anyone who shares it can be jailed for 14 years.

The document was suppressed as part of the efforts to cover up the role of the state and political parties, in New Zealand and internationally, in creating the political climate for the development of fascism. These include the systematic whipping up of anti-immigrant xenophobia by governments for decades, in particular the vilification of

Muslims as part of the bogus US-led war on terror. Many of the views in Tarrant's manifesto are not very different from those held by governments and longstanding parliamentary parties throughout the world.

Auckland University of Technology professor Kris Gledhill told Fairfax Media that under the terrorism laws, the prosecution would have to show how the accused was "trying to instil terror in the population through the advancement of a political, ideological or religious cause."

A murder charge only seeks to answer the more straightforward question of whether he killed deliberately. "The prosecution can make sure they don't bring a charge which implicitly brings a [political] platform into the arena. His ideology is not relevant to whether he committed murder," Gledhill declared. "My hope would be they do it fairly speedily, and that the prosecutors make decisions that minimise his soapbox."

From the moment of Tarrant's first appearance in court following his arrest, there has been considerable nervousness that he will attempt to use the court as a political platform. Surviving the attack and pleading not guilty was an aim outlined in Tarrant's manifesto.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has called for a "conversation" with the media over coverage of the Christchurch case. "I would hope there are ways that [the trial] could be covered without adding to the notoriety that this individual seeks," she said. Arden added, not for the first time: "One thing I can assure you, you won't hear me speak his name."

Some commentators have noted that Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik, Tarrant's idol, who committed a similar mass murder in 2011, opened his defence by giving a Nazi-style salute to the court. This was broadcast live and appeared on newspaper front pages around the world. The court prohibited any further live broadcasts and also prohibited the media from recording some of the evidence.

Media commentator Gavin Ellis told *Newsroom* that the court had the power to control the accused's ability to

similarly use the trial. “If he starts off on a sort of a dialectic rant, then it's within the power of the court to shut him up because it's not adding to the ability of the court to determine guilt or innocence,” Ellis said.

The notion that Tarrant’s fascist political motivations are “not relevant” to the crime is patently absurd. The push to dispense with terrorism charges, get the trial over with as quickly as possible, and prevent the fascist gunman from speaking at any length, has nothing to do with denying him “notoriety” or “a soap-box.” The aim is to prevent the public from drawing conclusions about the striking resemblance of Tarrant’s views to those of parties including the National Party, Labour and its ally NZ First, and the trade unions, which have for years fomented anti-immigrant xenophobia.

The government and judiciary are also undoubtedly concerned that Tarrant could voice his strong admiration for the military and police. The gunman estimates that hundreds of thousands of far-right nationalists in Europe are employed in the armed forces. New Zealand’s state agencies are keen to avoid questions about whether any of their members are involved in, or sympathise with, fascist groups.

The government, corporate media and state apparatus also do not want any discussion of the fascist killer’s hostility towards Marxism and socialism, which the ruling elite shares. As the economic crisis deepens and countries throughout the world prepare for war, millions of young people are moving to the left and are sympathetic to socialism. It is necessary to understand that fascism is not simply the ideas of a few murderous racists. It is a political tendency deliberately nurtured by the political establishment, and with close connections to the state, that will be used against the working class, especially its most class conscious, socialist elements.



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