

Australian police dismissed death threat by Christchurch terrorist

Tom Peters
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A few hours after the March 15 mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch which killed 50 people and injured more, New Zealand's police commissioner Mike Bush was asked in a press conference: "Why were these people [initially there was more than one suspect] not on a security watch list? Were they completely unknown to police?"

He replied: "No agency had any information about these people... I've been in contact with my Australian colleagues, they have no information on them at all either."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison told the media that the shooter, Australian fascist Brenton Tarrant, was "on nobody's radar, anywhere." New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern made a similar statement.

In fact, it is now clear that the gunman had come to the attention of Australian police more than two years before the attack. On Wednesday, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported that in September 2016, a man went to police in the Melbourne suburb of Eltham after receiving a death threat from Tarrant via Facebook.

The man had criticised the United Patriots Front (UPF), an extreme-right group that was planning an anti-refugee rally in Melbourne. In response, Tarrant said: "The UPF is the leading ethno-nationalist group within Australia... When you speak against the UPF you speak against my right to a home for my people and my culture. This marks you."

Tarrant warned the man to "choose your words carefully" and "think of who you insult." He then added: "If you are a nationalist I hope you one day see the light, and if you are a Marxist I hope you one day meet the rope."

The man made a screenshot of Tarrant's Facebook

message and took it to police, who dismissed the death threat and told him to block Tarrant on Facebook. Police did not take an official statement.

Victoria Police told the ABC yesterday they had "no record" of the 2016 complaint, adding that they had "strong arrangements in place for monitoring and tracking people who pose a threat to the community."

There is no innocent explanation for police refusing to investigate or even, apparently, make a record of Tarrant's death threat. The episode raises extremely disturbing questions about the relationship between the police and Australia's anti-immigrant and fascist groups.

The death threat was not an isolated incident. Tarrant made numerous public comments on Facebook in 2016 hailing the UPF and its neo-Nazi leader, Blair Cottrell, and threatening "globalists and Marxists."

In one instance, when members of the UPF violently clashed with counter-protesters in Coburg, Tarrant wrote: "Communists will get what communists get, I would love to be there holding one end of the rope when you get yours traitor." All of this was apparently ignored by police and intelligence agencies.

In New Zealand, police similarly dismissed a complaint made in late 2017 by Peter Briedhal, who was concerned about the racist, anti-Muslim comments expressed by members of the Bruce Rifle Club, which Tarrant had joined after moving to New Zealand that year. When Briedhal went to police he was told not to worry, and his complaint was not recorded.

If authorities had "no information" on the Christchurch terrorist, this is because police in Australia and New Zealand had deliberately shielded him. For several years he was allowed to travel the world, donate to fascist groups in Europe, amass a stockpile of weapons and prepare his atrocity, all while

making public comments on Facebook and 8chan expressing his murderous hatred of Marxists and Muslims.

The reason Tarrant was not stopped is suggested in his fascist manifesto, which expresses support for the military and police and states that he did not want to shoot any police officers in the course of his attack. He estimated that in Europe hundreds of thousands of far-right nationalists were employed in the armed forces.

The manifesto has been banned by New Zealand's chief censor in order to prevent public discussion of Tarrant's political motivations. The ruling elite do not want any questions raised about whether members of the police and intelligence agencies in New Zealand and Australia share Tarrant's fascist views.

The document shows the similarity of the gunman's anti-immigrant and anti-Marxist politics to those of the political establishment throughout the world, including the administration of US President Donald Trump.

In Australia and New Zealand, anti-Muslim racism has been cultivated for decades to justify the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have killed more than a million people. Xenophobia has also been whipped up, including by the NZ Labour Party and trade unions, to scapegoat immigrants for the worsening social crisis, especially following the 2008 financial crash. New Zealand First, which is part of the Labour-led government, has frequently demonised Muslims and Chinese people, using language similar to that of the Christchurch shooter.

The entire Australian political establishment and media have viciously attacked refugees fleeing wars in the Middle East and elsewhere, creating an environment in which right-wing nationalist groups have flourished. The UPF and True Blue Crew have received significant promotion on TV and radio programs. One Channel 7 report in January 2018 described these fascist organisations, led by admirers of Adolf Hitler, as concerned "patriots" seeking "to help average Australians deal with what they are calling an immigrant crime crisis."

The working class must draw the necessary political lessons from the systematic promotion of the extreme right by capitalist parties and the media, and the protection given to fascists like Tarrant by the police. The official response to the Christchurch shootings is to cover up the political roots of the attack and push for

censorship of the internet and other police-state powers. These will be used, not against fascists, but against workers and young people who are moving to the left and seeking to fight against austerity and militarism.

"The historic function of fascism," Leon Trotsky wrote in 1934, "is to smash the working class, destroy its organisations, and stifle political liberties when the capitalists find themselves unable to govern and dominate with the help of democratic machinery." He warned workers that it was fatal to rely on the police or bourgeois parliaments to oppose fascism.

Today, while fascism is not a mass movement, it presents a growing danger to working people throughout the world, amid the most severe crisis of global capitalism since the 1930s. The working class must respond by building a socialist movement to unite workers around the world in a political fight to abolish capitalism, which is the source of nationalism and fascism as well as social inequality and war.

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