

Australian fascist group tried to recruit Christchurch terrorist

Tom Peters
8 May 2019

The *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed on May 2 that in 2017 the Australian fascist and white supremacist Lads Society tried to recruit Brenton Tarrant, who carried out the March 15 terrorist attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The death toll from New Zealand's worst-ever mass shooting increased to 51 on May 2 after Turkish citizen Zekeriya Tuyan succumbed to injuries in hospital. Dozens more were injured in the atrocity, which the gunman had spent at least two years preparing.

The latest revelation further discredits the claims by Australian and New Zealand governments and police, along with much of the media, that Tarrant was a lone gunman whose attack could not have been prevented. NZ police commissioner Mike Bush repeated to TVNZ on Monday that the shooter was “not ever on anyone's radar.” In fact, Tarrant had long-standing links with Australian far-right groups, made repeated threats of violence, and donated large sums to the racist Identitarian movements in Austria and France.

The Lads Society is one of several neo-Nazi groups which, despite their small membership, have received extensive publicity in the corporate media in recent years, and are closely monitored by police and intelligence agencies. Like the Christchurch shooter, the group was emboldened by the election victory of US President Donald Trump and the shift to the right by the entire political establishment in Australia and internationally.

In a May 3 blog post, Lads Society leader Thomas Sewell said the group's members were “the sons of Nietzsche, of Evola, of Hitler, of [British fascist Oswald] Mosley, of [Enoch] Powell.” The society describes non-white immigration as the “genocide” of the white race and seeks to establish an ethnically cleansed state.

According to Sewell, he personally met Tarrant, but people in the fascist scene “had known of Tarrant online for at least three years.” Tarrant supported the United Patriots Front, the predecessor of the Lads Society, in numerous Facebook comments. He hailed UPF leader and Lads Society co-founder Blair Cottrell as an “Emperor.”

In 2016, Tarrant sent a Facebook message threatening to kill a man who had denounced an anti-immigrant rally held by the UPF. The threat was shown to Melbourne police, who dismissed it and took no action. In New Zealand, police similarly ignored a report in 2017 from a member of the public about violent and anti-Muslim language at the Bruce Rifle Club, where Tarrant was a member.

Sewell told the *Herald* he had corresponded with Tarrant and invited him to join the Lads Society but Tarrant declined because he “didn't believe there was a peaceful solution to European people being genocided.” Sewell said “we believe, *certainly at this stage*, that there is a peaceful solution for us to create the society we want to live in.” [emphasis added]

In other words, the difference with Tarrant was a matter of timing and tactics, and did not concern their shared fascist politics and willingness to use violent methods.

Sewell added that the group was prepared to resort to violence “if the state continues its persecution of our people for wanting to preserve their culture and heritage” or if his members were arrested. “I'm not going to give you any explicit threat but it's pretty f—king obvious what's going to happen,” Sewell said.

In fact, far from being persecuted, fascists feel able to make such public threats because they are confident of being protected by the state apparatus. On March 20, the Lads Society revealed that it had a friendly visit

from the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and state police “to ask for our insight into the motivations of Brenton Tarrant and how they can assist us in ensuring our lawful community organisation can succeed and grow in order to prevent further isolation, radicalisation and potentially any future politically motivated violence.”

Following the Christchurch shooting, ASIO’s director-general Duncan Lewis told a Senate committee there was “nothing wrong with” right-wing extremism “except when it ventures into violence.” He declared there was no need to refocus intelligence gathering on far-right groups, which were already being monitored. ASIO and the police did not explain why they took no action in response to Tarrant’s repeated threats on social media to attack immigrants, “Marxists and globalists.”

In Europe and the US, there are extensive neo-Nazi networks and fascist sympathisers within the military, border security and intelligence agencies. Tarrant, who travelled throughout Europe in the years before his attack, estimated that hundreds of thousands of European far-right nationalists were employed in the armed forces.

Members of the “alt-right” are being welcomed into established bourgeois parties, which have largely adopted their xenophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric in order to divide the working class and deflect blame for social inequality and poverty onto immigrants. Labor and the Liberal-National coalition have for decades demonised and imprisoned refugees, and joined US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In late 2017 and 2018 a group of 22 fascists, including members of the Lads Society and Antipodean Resistance, were admitted into the youth wing New South Wales branch of the National Party, which is part of the Liberal-National coalition government. A leading member of the group, Clifford Jennings, was voted onto the executive of the NSW National Party youth. The group, which included open racists and admirers of Adolf Hitler, was only expelled following an investigation by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in October 2018.

In the lead-up to the May 18 federal election, the same elements are campaigning for the Conservative National Party, founded by independent senator Fraser Anning, a former member of the racist One Nation

party. Anning issued a press release following the Christchurch shootings blaming the victims for the attack and declaring that Muslim immigration was the “real cause of bloodshed on New Zealand’s streets today.” Anning is openly campaigning for a white “ethno-state” and to “ban all Muslim and Black immigration.”

In New Zealand, the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party is a partner in Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s Labour-led coalition government. NZ First has repeatedly demonised Muslims and Chinese immigrants, using language similar to Tarrant’s. Ardern adopted the right-wing party’s anti-immigrant policies and made NZ First leader Winston Peters deputy prime minister and foreign minister.

Notwithstanding their hypocritical professions of sympathy for the Christchurch victims and the Muslim community, the ruling class in Australia and New Zealand continue to promote the fascist forces that led to the atrocity and will be used against the working class as it seeks to organise in opposition to austerity and imperialist war.



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