

New Zealand neo-Nazi jailed for 21 months for sharing video of mosque shootings

Tom Peters
24 June 2019

On June 19, the Christchurch District Court sentenced 44-year-old Philip Neville Arps, a well-known neo-Nazi, to 21 months in prison for sharing fascist gunman Brenton Tarrant's video of the March 15 Christchurch terrorist attack.

Tarrant livestreamed his horrific attack on two mosques, where he killed 51 people and injured dozens more. Hundreds of people viewed the footage live on Facebook and YouTube and millions of copies have reportedly been shared since the attack.

After Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern denounced the sharing of the video, it was classified as "objectionable" by New Zealand's Chief Censor David Shanks soon after the attack, as was Tarrant's fascist manifesto. Under these anti-democratic restrictions anyone caught in possession of the footage or the document can be imprisoned for as long as 14 years.

Arps pleaded guilty to sharing the video on social media. He had also posted numerous comments glorifying the massacre, including a suggestion that a "kill count" be added to the video. A hardened fascist, Arps reportedly possessed copies of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and compared himself to Rudolf Hess, a leading figure in the Nazi Party.

Arps' views are repugnant, but it would be a very dangerous error to believe that his imprisonment will do anything to stop the growth of the extreme right-wing movements, which have been deliberately promoted by the political establishment and protected by the state, including the police and courts.

Arps was not jailed for making violent threats against Muslims, although he has done so in the past, but simply for sharing a banned video.

His trial represents a test case for anti-democratic legislation that can and will be used against the working class, especially its most conscious left-wing and socialist elements. The laws under which Arps was charged are part of a broader turn towards police state forms of rule,

directed against mounting opposition to social inequality, authoritarianism and war.

The sentencing of Arps has been universally praised in the New Zealand media, which is hypocritically denouncing racism and seeking to wash its hands of any responsibility for promoting nationalism and xenophobia.

The same media glorified Ardern's phony display of "compassion" following the Christchurch attack, despite the fact that the anti-Muslim NZ First Party plays a major role in her Labour Party-led coalition government. NZ First leader Winston Peters, who is both deputy prime minister and foreign minister, has ranted on numerous occasions against Muslim immigration, in language similar to that used by Brenton Tarrant.

News outlets have also heavily promoted racist provocateurs such as Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux, who visited from Canada last year, and Brian Tamaki whose fundamentalist Destiny Church staged an anti-Muslim rally outside the Al Noor mosque, after the terrorist attack.

At least eight other people have reportedly been brought before the courts for possession or distribution of the mosque attacks video. The accused's names and many other details have been suppressed, but they include a 17-year-old, two 18-year-olds and one aged 22. One of the teenagers had made threats against the Al Noor mosque, but it is not clear that all those arrested have fascist and racist views.

Many thousands of people shared the video during and after the Christchurch attack, the overwhelming majority of whom were horrified by its contents and wanted to alert others to the appalling magnitude of the crime. Ardern herself has said she came across the video in her Facebook feed.

Countless journalists also watched the video and excerpts appeared in the media internationally, including on Australian television. In New Zealand, reporting that

includes Tarrant's video has effectively been criminalised.

The banning of the video and manifesto will not prevent their circulation in extreme right-wing circles. As Chief Censor Shanks admitted, censorship has given the manifesto "cachet" among fascists internationally.

The corporate media is complicit in this censorship. After Ardern personally urged reporters not to focus on Tarrant, and pledged to never speak his name, five NZ media organisations signed an extraordinary agreement to self-censor their coverage of his trial to avoid any reference to his racist ideology and manifesto.

The censorship is aimed at severely restricting public scrutiny and discussion of the terrorist attack, its political causes, and the role of the police and intelligence agencies in failing to prevent New Zealand's worst mass shooting.

The manifesto's racist, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim language resembles the right-wing nationalist rhetoric used by the Trump administration and many other governments, including the Labour Party-NZ First coalition. It also highlights Tarrant's hatred of Marxism and socialism and his sympathy for the military and police.

As the WSWS has noted, the 17-minute video raises serious questions about why Tarrant was not stopped. It shows the gunman driving for several minutes to the Al Noor mosque after publicly announcing his intentions on Facebook and a fascist *8chan* forum, with his gun visible in the car. Tarrant was able to kill dozens of people before driving to a second mosque, without being stopped by police, to continue his massacre.

The Christchurch attack could only happen because the state ignored violent threats from the extreme right. In 2017, Dunedin police dismissed a complaint about racist and violent discussions at the Bruce Rifle Club, where Tarrant was a member. The previous year, Australian police dismissed a complaint from someone in Melbourne who received a death threat from Tarrant.

Arps has 30 previous convictions, including for assault. In 2016 he and several other fascists dumped a box of pigs' heads outside Al Noor mosque. He then shared a video of himself threatening to kill Muslims on social media. For that crime Arps was merely fined \$800 for "offensive behaviour" and nothing was done to protect the mosque from attacks.

Ardern is playing a leading role in a global campaign to exploit the Christchurch attacks to ban "violent" and "extremist" content from social media. Already, the Australian government has passed a law allowing social

media executives to be prosecuted and imprisoned if they fail to remove content that is deemed objectionable.

Ardern falsely claimed that removing such videos will reduce the danger of terrorism and is not censorship. What constitutes "extremist" material, however, will be decided by the state in collaboration with giant corporations such as Facebook. Such laws can easily be used to censor any videos or pictures of violence, for instance exposing war crimes or police shootings, and imprison those sharing such material.

Fascism cannot be combated by strengthening the forces of the state, including the police, military, intelligence agencies and the judicial system, which exist to protect capitalism and suppress the working class.

Today, amid economic turmoil and the rising danger of war, the state is again nurturing fascist forces, including in Germany and the US, to be mobilised against the working class. The political and academic efforts to revive fascism in Germany are analysed in the new book *Why Are They Back?* by Christoph Vandreier.

At the same time, journalists and whistleblowers who expose war crimes, such as Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, are being persecuted and left-wing and socialist publications, including the *World Socialist Web Site*, are being censored.

All historical experience, including the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s, demonstrates that the only way to defeat fascism and prevent a repeat of the horrific crimes of the twentieth century is through the independent political mobilisation of the working class based on a socialist and internationalist program.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact