

New Zealand media promote new far-right Christian party

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2 July 2019

A political party launched in May by the Christian fundamentalist Destiny Church has received an avalanche of free publicity from New Zealand's corporate and state-owned media, and is being actively promoted by sections of the political establishment.

The party, named Coalition NZ, is led by Hannah Tamaki, wife of Destiny's self-styled "bishop," Brian Tamaki. Despite not having released any concrete policies, Coalition NZ has been given extensive coverage, aimed at legitimising Destiny Church's right-wing, bigoted and xenophobic political agenda.

On May 27, opposition National Party leader Simon Bridges told Newshub that he would not rule out working with Coalition NZ to try and replace the current Labour Party-NZ First-Greens coalition in the next election. Senior Labour Party MPs such as Andrew Little have also expressed willingness to work with Destiny.

Destiny Church is an extreme right-wing organisation, widely despised by ordinary working people. It previously formed two political parties, Destiny NZ and the Family Party, which contested the 2005 and 2008 elections, both times receiving well below 1 percent of the votes. At least 5 percent is needed to enter parliament.

Despite lacking popular support, Coalition NZ is being elevated as part of the increasingly sharp shift to the right by the ruling class. As in the US, Australia and Europe, far-right and fascist forces are being deliberately cultivated so they can be used to divide and suppress workers who are coming into struggle against austerity and war and are increasingly supportive of socialism.

Destiny is thought to have between 5,000 and 10,000 members. It is modelled on similar evangelical churches in the United States. Founded in 1998, it came to prominence in 2004 with a campaign against civil unions for same-sex couples. In a 2016 sermon Brian Tamaki blamed the 2011 Christchurch earthquake, which killed 185 people, on "sin" including homosexuality. The

church is notorious for recruiting members from heavily exploited layers of the working class, including Maori, and demanding steep tithes to fund the Tamakis' opulent lifestyle.

The media's infatuation with Destiny Church exposes the profound hypocrisy of declarations supporting Muslims and immigrants following the Christchurch terrorist attack on March 15. After fascist gunman Brenton Tarrant killed 51 people and injured 40, the media and political leaders adopted Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's slogan "they are us," supposedly expressing solidarity with the victims. Ardern, who has exploited the atrocity to advocate increased censorship of the media and the internet, was glorified internationally for supposedly showing "compassion" by wearing a headscarf and hugging survivors.

All of this was a complete sham. Every party in parliament, along with the corporate media, are complicit in stoking racism and xenophobia to divert blame for New Zealand's social crisis, and to justify participation in illegal US-led wars in the Middle East. In the lead-up to the 2017 election, both Labour and NZ First scapegoated immigrants for social inequality and the housing crisis. Ardern gave NZ First leader Winston Peters—well-known for his racist rants against Muslims, Chinese people and "mass immigration"—a major role in her government, making him foreign minister and deputy prime minister.

Destiny Church expresses the same views even more crudely. It organised a despicable anti-Muslim rally on April 25 outside the Al Noor mosque, where most of Tarrant's victims were murdered. Destiny's Christchurch pastor Derek Taitt told the media, "the purpose was to ... declare that Christchurch and New Zealand belongs to Jesus Christ who is the one true god." This echoed Tarrant's fascist manifesto, which called for the expulsion of Muslims and the destruction of mosques in Europe and other "Western" countries.

Not long afterwards, on May 6, TVNZ aired a friendly interview with Brian Tamaki, which he used to promote Destiny Church's prisoner "rehabilitation" program "Man Up." Tamaki has demanded that the government fund this program, which is aimed at recruiting prisoners into the church. Asked if he approved of the anti-Muslim rally by Destiny's Christchurch members, Tamaki said he did, but that the timing was inappropriate.

On June 13, Tamaki posted a Facebook rant denouncing a new Muslim school opening in Auckland. Echoing the Christchurch terrorist and fascistic figures such as Australian ex-senator Fraser Anning, Tamaki declared that Muslim immigration was to blame for "violence," "Sharia law" and "the outright destruction of Western Civilisation." Tamaki was blocked from advertising the post, but it received widespread coverage in the media.

Following the launch of Coalition NZ, Hannah Tamaki has been interviewed numerous times, advocating a return to Christian "family values" and denouncing abortion and homosexuality. She told Radio NZ that spending by social welfare recipients should be monitored by the state, and called for a massive cut to immigration, saying 5,000 immigrants per year was too many.

On June 2, TVNZ aired a segment promoting "Man Up" and Destiny Church's fake "apology" to LGBT people for the Tamakis' anti-gay statements. Hannah Tamaki used the opportunity to express sympathy with far-right US President Donald Trump, calling him "a winner" and denouncing the media's supposed bias against him. Neither Radio NZ nor TVNZ challenged Hannah Tamaki about Destiny's inflammatory attacks on Muslims.

While Ardern publicly criticised Destiny Church's anti-Muslim statements, the organisation has clearly been emboldened by her Labour-NZ First coalition's right-wing nationalist policies. Hannah Tamaki described NZ First leader Peters as "awesome" and praised NZ First MP Shane Jones as well as prominent Maori Labour Party MP Willie Jackson. In February, Justice Minister Andrew Little told TVNZ the Labour Party would consider funding "Man Up" and working with a Destiny political party, saying Labour had "to be prepared to work with all those who have something useful to offer."

Significantly, a major role in Coalition NZ is being played by Jevan Goulter, formerly a member of the Maori nationalist Mana Party. Mana's leader Hone Harawira has urged the government to fund "Man Up" and has not ruled out collaborating with Coalition NZ.

Mana was fraudulently promoted as "left wing" and "anti-capitalist" by NZ's pseudo-left groups. Fightback,

Socialist Aotearoa and the International Socialist Organisation. Leaders of the Unite union joined and campaigned for Mana between 2011 and 2014. In fact, Mana was always a nationalist, anti-immigrant party, which used race-based identity politics to advance the interests of Maori capitalist and upper middle-class layers. Harawira, once described by the ISO as "the only principled MP in parliament," failed to win a seat in the 2017 election after he sought an alliance with NZ First and called for Chinese drug smugglers to be "executed."

The promotion of fascistic organisations such as the Destiny Church by the political and media establishment must be taken as a warning. In response to the Christchurch massacre, the ruling elite, far from promoting tolerance and diversity, is turning with even more determination to the same forces used in Europe in the 1930s to prop up capitalist rule: fascism, extreme nationalism and a strong police-state apparatus.

While Destiny Church and similar tendencies internationally do not have mass support, the danger they represent is real and should not be downplayed. The only way to stop the rise of the far right is through the creation of an internationalist and socialist movement that can unite the working class in a political fight to abolish the fundamental source of social inequality, racism, war and all forms of chauvinism and backwardness: the capitalist and nation-state system itself.



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