

New Zealand soldier linked to fascist groups arrested

Tom Peters
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On December 18, *Newsroom* reported that a soldier thought to be a far-right extremist was arrested and placed in military custody following a joint investigation by the New Zealand Police and the Defence Force. The report said “far-right bodybuilding club” Wargus Christi had claimed that the unnamed soldier is a member, posting on the messaging app Telegram: “One of our boys has been arrested for reasons still unknown. They have him in custody at the moment.”

Authorities have not released any details other than saying that the 27-year-old man, based at Linton Military Camp near Palmerston North, was arrested following a criminal investigation and a search warrant. The Defence Force has not confirmed what charges, if any, the man faces, and stated that an investigation is ongoing.

According to *Stuff*, an anonymous source said the man had been spoken to by police following the March 15, 2019 terrorist attack in Christchurch, in which fascist Brenton Tarrant killed 51 people and injured 49 at two mosques. The source, who claimed to be close to the man’s family, said the soldier was arrested last month shortly before a planned visit to Russia. “We are absolutely shocked and as the day goes by they are learning more about what he has been up to online,” the source said.

Wargus Christi was founded in September by neo-Nazi Daniel Waring, reportedly a former member of the skinhead group Blood and Honour. According to *Newsroom*, “Wargus Christi claims it is a ‘martial-monastic Christian brotherhood’ and mixes Crusades-inspired Christian extremist imagery with modern far-right memes.” Its Facebook page, which is no longer accessible, regularly threatened Jews, Muslims and homosexuals.

Both the arrest and the official secrecy surrounding it raise disturbing questions. Chief among them is whether Tarrant had any contact with the Linton soldier or other members of the NZ military during the two years in which he lived in New Zealand and prepared his attack with military-style weapons.

Throughout history, the armed forces of the capitalist state have been breeding grounds for far-right nationalists and fascists. Numerous reports show that far-right and neo-Nazi groups are active throughout the US military. These elements have been emboldened by President Donald Trump, who is seeking to create a fascist base of support, including by pardoning war criminals.

The Christchurch shooter wrote in his manifesto that thousands of extreme right-wing nationalists were members of the armed forces. He expressed sympathy for the police and military, saying he did not want to shoot any of them during his attack. The gunman was only able to carry out his attack thanks to protection from Australian police, who dismissed his violent threats to kill “communists,” and NZ police, who granted him a firearms license and ignored reports of violent anti-Muslim views expressed at the gun club where Tarrant practiced.

Tarrant’s manifesto was suppressed by the state censor following the March 15 attack in an attempt to prevent public discussion of these issues, and to create a precedent for broader attacks on democratic rights.

The arrested soldier’s name has been published in at least one US-based website, but he cannot be identified in New Zealand because of an interim name suppression order issued by his commanding officer in the army. No explanation was given for the order.

According to the US website, the soldier posted on social media in 2014 that he “joined a Nazi

organisation.” He also made numerous statements expressing admiration for Hitler, and hatred for Jews, Muslims, black people, women and LGBTQ people.

In addition to Wargus Christi, the soldier was reportedly associated with the Dominion Movement, a New Zealand fascist group that closed down its website and moved underground following the March 15 attack.

Defence Minister Ron Mark, a member of the right-wing, anti-immigrant NZ First Party, told *Stuff* that he had been briefed on the arrest at Linton Military Camp. He refused to comment when asked if the man posed a risk to national security. He declared: “What I take strength and confidence in is that this has happened, and the military are clearly very observant, doing their job.”

In fact, the presence of fascists in the military must come as a sharp warning to the working class. The fact that he was questioned following March 15 suggests that his superiors knew about his beliefs, yet he was allowed to keep his job.

Massey University professor Paul Spoonley, who has researched the far-right in New Zealand, told Radio NZ the arrested soldier is not an isolated individual. “I’ve certainly been concerned through this year at some of the comments that I’ve seen which appear to come from Defence Force personnel which are really very anti-Muslim, and anti-Semitic,” he said.

Such views are encouraged by the imperialist and criminal operations carried out by the military. Under successive Labour Party and National Party-led governments, New Zealand has participated in the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for nearly two decades that have together killed well over a million people and destroyed entire societies. The elite NZ Special Air Service has been implicated in war crimes, including the killing of Afghan civilians during a raid on a village in 2010, and of two children in 2004. The Defence Force attempted to cover up both incidents and no one has been held responsible.

While there is no mass support for fascism, the entire political establishment is promoting national chauvinism and militarism to deflect opposition to social inequality, which has continued to soar under Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s Labour Party-led government despite its false promises to address poverty. NZ First, which plays a major role in the governing coalition, regularly whips up racism and

xenophobia, including against Muslims and Asian immigrants, while simultaneously pushing for a stronger military and police force—all with Labour’s full support.

Defence Minister Mark is overseeing a major boost to the size of the regular army, from 4,500 to 6,000 soldiers by 2030. The government is also recruiting an extra 1,800 police officers, an increase of about 20 percent. Seeking to outflank Labour, the opposition National Party is promising a crackdown on welfare beneficiaries and fomenting law-and-order hysteria against gang members. As the ruling class lurches further to the right and prepares to join new US wars—with possible targets including Iran, Russia and China—it will seek to use far-right and fascist forces against opposition from the working class.



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