

One year after the New Zealand fascist terrorist attack

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On March 15, 2019, a fascist terrorist armed with a military-style semiautomatic rifle drove to two mosques in Christchurch and murdered 51 Muslim worshippers and injured 49. It was New Zealand's worst ever mass shooting and one of the most brutal in the world. The murderer, Australian-born Brenton Tarrant, whose racist views had been shaped by the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the Australian and American political establishment, livestreamed his attack. The massacre was widely viewed before being taken off social media.

The victims came from several countries and included elderly people and young children. Many survivors suffered debilitating injuries, inability to work and psychological trauma. The city's health authorities expect the anniversary to trigger painful memories and increased demand for mental health services.

The attacks prompted an outpouring of shock and grief in New Zealand, Australia and internationally. People from around the world have travelled to the mosques to show solidarity with the Muslim community. Remembrance events scheduled for tomorrow, expected to attract large crowds, have been cancelled due to fears of coronavirus transmission.

Twelve months on, however, the danger of the far right and fascism continues to grow throughout the world. While there is no mass support for fascism, it is being deliberately promoted by US President Donald Trump, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Australia's Scott Morrison, and many other political leaders.

Over the past year, fascist and white supremacist terror attacks have included the April 27 shooting at Poway synagogue in California and the August 3 massacre of 21 people in El Paso, Texas. The perpetrators claimed inspiration from Tarrant.

In Germany, where the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD) is the main opposition party and its anti-immigrant policies have been adopted by the coalition government, there has been a series of neo-Nazi attacks. These include the murder of politician Walter Lübcke in June 2019 and the massacre of 11 people at two shisha bars in Hanau in February 2020.

Tarrant and others like him are the products of decades of xenophobic demonisation of Muslims by the media and politicians. Successive Australian and New Zealand governments sent troops to the US imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. To justify their involvement in predatory neo-colonial interventions, the ruling elite claimed they were fighting Islamic terrorism. At the same time, their police and spy agencies turned a blind eye to the growth of far-right extremism.

The Islamic Women's Council, in its submission to a royal commission of inquiry into the Christchurch shootings, stated that the attacks would not have happened if government agencies had acted on warnings about rising xenophobia and threats to the Muslim community. These included violent threats against the Al Noor mosque by Christchurch neo-Nazis in 2016. Nothing was done and the warnings were dismissed.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern continues to be glorified in the world's media for her purported show of sympathy following the March 15 attack. She promised to make it her "personal mission as prime minister" to defend "inclusiveness" and "diversity." She stated: "I have the support of every single member of parliament, local government, at every level of New Zealand, absolute unity in that cause and in that mission."

These pledges have proven to be a fraud. Ardern's Labour Party-NZ First-Greens coalition government has ramped-up anti-immigrant measures, including restrictions that prevent working class migrants from bringing family members to New Zealand. The government routinely deports vulnerable people, including a paralysed Tongan woman who was deported in January despite doctors warning she was at risk of dying.

Ardern's government rests on the racist and nationalist NZ First Party. Despite receiving just 7.2 percent of votes in the 2017 election, Labour has given the right-wing party some of the most critical ministries. NZ First Party leader Winston Peters is both the deputy prime minister and foreign minister, Ron Mark is the defence minister and Shane Jones is regional development minister.

NZ First has long espoused anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim views similar to those in Tarrant's fascist manifesto, "The Great Replacement." Recently, Jones ranted against Indian students and migrants, depicting them as a threat to New Zealand and Maori culture. NZ First and Labour have also campaigned against Chinese immigration and "influence," in an effort to align New Zealand with the US economic war and military build-up against China.

NZ First has been promoted for years by Labour, the Greens and their supporters, including the "left-wing" *Daily Blog*. In a significant admission six days after the Christchurch atrocity, Green Party MP Golriz Ghahraman told Radio NZ that every party, including her own, had scapegoated migrants for problems such as underfunded health services. Ghahraman admitted: "We've all done things that have fanned the flames of division."

The Greens, however, continue to prop up the government and work closely with NZ First. Co-leader James Shaw recently collaborated with Defence Minister Mark on a document justifying military spending as necessary to prepare for the effects of climate change.

The royal commission into the Christchurch attack is due to report its findings on April 30. It has held its hearings in secret to ensure that the public never knows what information the Security Intelligence Service, the Government Communications Security Bureau and the police had about Tarrant, and whether he had accomplices.

Tarrant has been portrayed as a lone gunman, but he had links with several fascist groups including in Australia, Austria and France. The extent of these ties and his connections within New Zealand has not been revealed.

State and media-imposed censorship surrounds the case. The Chief Censor suppressed Tarrant's manifesto to prevent public discussion about its similarity to the views of NZ First, Trump and other politicians. The document expressed hatred of Marxism and socialism, and states that there are thousands of fascists in the armed forces internationally. Corporate and state-owned media have agreed to a request by Ardern to self-censor coverage of Tarrant's views in his upcoming trial.

A book published late last year in Australia, which quotes from the manifesto, *Fascists Among Us* by pseudo-left author Jeff Sparrow, has not been distributed in New Zealand. The publisher Scribe told the WSWS it had received legal advice that it could "lead to a contempt of court charge" in NZ.

The government has exploited the tragedy to bolster the intelligence agencies' resources, expand the number of armed police officers, and push for censorship of social media and the internet. None of these measures have anything to do with stopping fascism. They are instead part of preparations to suppress growing working-class opposition to austerity and militarism and will inevitably be used against workers with socialist views.

Significantly, Police Minister Stuart Nash recently told Radio NZ that police would not tolerate "extremist" activity "from the far-right or the far-left" ahead of the March 15 anniversary. He did not explain what he meant by "far-left" extremism.

There is ample evidence of how state agencies have protected fascists, including Tarrant. Australian police dismissed a report of a death threat sent by Tarrant in 2016 to a supporter of refugees. New Zealand police similarly dismissed a complaint in 2017 about violent and anti-Muslim language from members of the gun club where Tarrant trained for his attack.

Academic Paul Spoonley, who has spent decades researching the far right, wrote on the *Conversation* that there are "about 60 to 70 groups and somewhere between 150 and 300 core right-wing activists in New Zealand." Given NZ's population of around five million, the figure is "proportionate" to "the estimated 12,000 to 13,000 violent far-right activists in Germany."

As in the US and Germany, leading NZ fascists are in the military. They include a soldier arrested and charged in January with disclosing information "likely to prejudice the security or defence of New Zealand." The soldier, whose name is suppressed, is a founding member of the fascist Dominion Movement, which

was renamed Action Zealandia (AZ) following the mosque attacks.

Sam Brittenden, another AZ member, was arrested on March 4 for making an online threat to attack Al Noor mosque. The White Rose Society in Australia reported on March 10 on encrypted messages it had obtained from a third AZ member, Max Newsome, a former soldier. Newsome corresponded with members of US neo-Nazi terrorist group Atomwaffen Division and the Scandinavian Nordic Resistance Movement.

Action Zealandia's agenda dovetails with the anti-Chinese campaign waged by military strategists in academia and sections of the media and the government. In January, AZ vandalised the office of Chinese-born National Party MP Jian Yang, who pro-US academic Anne-Marie Brady and NZ First have demonised as an "agent" of the Chinese Communist Party.

The working class must draw the necessary political lessons from the Christchurch terrorist attack and the ongoing promotion of nationalism, racism and militarism by the entire political establishment. The ruling elites and their political parties are resorting to anti-democratic and authoritarian methods of rule, and encouraging fascists, to defend the increasingly crisis-ridden and hated capitalist system.

There is overwhelming opposition to fascism, but historical experience demonstrates that mass hostility is not enough. The fight against fascism can only succeed if it is based on a clear socialist and internationalist strategy, aimed at uniting workers across all nationalities and ethnicities in a movement to end capitalism, the source of racism, war and social inequality.

The author also recommends:

The right-wing record of Jacinda Ardern's government in New Zealand
[3 February 2020]

Sound the alarm! Political conspiracy and the resurgence of fascism in Germany
[14 February 2020]

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