Editor of New Zealand's major corporate think tank exposed as a bigot

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14 December 2020

A December 11 *Newsroom* article by Marc Daalder revealed that New Zealand Initiative (NZI) chief editor Nathan Smith had a personal blog that "attacks Muslims and Jews and espouses incel [misogynist] ideology."

The NZI is New Zealand's most significant big business think tank. Its representatives are frequently interviewed in the media and publish op-eds advocating lower taxes, cuts to social services and other pro-corporate policies.

The think tank is funded by international corporations including Google, British American Tobacco and MasterCard; and New Zealand's five major banks, Fletcher Building, Countdown supermarkets, Contact Energy, Genesis Energy, Mainfreight and Vodafone, among others. The Universities of Auckland and Waikato, and Wellington City Council are also listed as members.

In short, the NZI represents the interests of dominant sections of New Zealand's capitalist class. Smith, who resigned following the *Newsroom* article, played a major role in the think tank for at least a year. He edited and co-wrote numerous publications and interviewed people for podcasts.

Many of these items were erased from NZI's website over the weekend, along with a brief biographical profile which had stated that Smith "brings deep experience writing about business and policy from his eight years as a reporter for the *National Business Review*, " where he wrote "weekly columns on foreign affairs and trade [and] coordinated the newspaper's feature section."

Smith's personal "Likebulb" blog, which has been deleted, contained views not very different to those of the fascist terrorist Brenton Tarrant, who massacred 51 Muslim worshippers in Christchurch on March 15, 2019, and far-right groups such as Action Zealandia.

Newsroom reported: "In a post from April 2018, Smith outright says he 'just [doesn't] like Arabs or Africans." In April 2020, Smith wrote: "While not all Jews encourage immoral behaviour (from a Christian perspective), most people who do tend to be Jewish. Same with influential positions in the West. Not all Jews are in those spots, but nearly all those spots are filled by Jews… The answer to why Jews keep being kicked out of Christian countries is Jewish behaviour."

In October 2020, he wrote: "The word 'racism' is a propaganda tool to pathologise normal human behaviour. Preferring your own race is a survival tool—like eating or sleeping."

Responding to the Christchurch terror attack, Smith wrote on March 24, 2019: "There is no such thing as racism." He called for Muslims to "forgive" Tarrant, adding: "Unfortunately, I have never heard a Muslim or a progressive forgive."

Like right-wing extremists internationally, including the Trump administration in the US, Smith downplayed the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, declaring that hospitals had inflated the death count.

NZI director Oliver Hartwich told *Stuff* he was "gobsmacked" to read about Smith's views: "I almost fell off my chair… His sub-editing was extremely good, the podcast extremely good… we had no idea. I'm horrified." Hartwich, who has known Smith for several years, said all publications Smith was involved in were being "vetted for any traces of his views."

The *National Business Review* (NBR), New Zealand's main financial newspaper, has remained silent about the fact that it employed an anti-Semite as a feature writer between 2012 and 2020.

It is scarcely credible that Smith's colleagues in the NZI and NBR had "no idea" about his views. Several

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of his NBR articles in 2012 contained a link to his Likebulb blog.

Hartwich told Radio NZ that Smith's "public writing in the [NBR] was very good and didn't expose any of these issues." In fact, his NBR articles frequently had a right-wing, militarist character and contributed to the demonisation of Muslims as potential terrorists. Smith defended mass surveillance by the US-led Five Eyes alliance, including New Zealand's spy agencies; criticised the exposure of war crimes by WikiLeaks, and praised New Zealand's alliance with US imperialism, including preparations for war against China.

An article on July 13, 2012, praised New Zealand's participation in US-led naval exercises and the US military build-up against China's increasingly capable navy. In January 2013, Smith wrote that NZ should send special forces to join the French war in Mali. On February 28, 2013, he hailed the CIA propaganda film *Zero Dark Thirty*, which glorifies the criminal war in Afghanistan and falsifies the killing of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Smith's November 2014 article, "'Jandalled jihadis' a growing threat in NZ," which NBR appears to have removed from its website without explanation, inflated the supposed "threat" of Islamic extremism to justify "anti-terror" legislation that further expanded the state's power to spy on the population.

The fact that Smith could fit in comfortably at the NBR and the NZI points to the increasingly far-right views held by the corporate elite and its media lackeys.

The NZI is a reactionary organisation dedicated to defending social inequality and the control of big business over all government policies. Its predecessor, the Business Roundtable, founded in 1986, played a key role in advising the then-Labour Party government as it launched a full-scale assault on the working class. Labour slashed taxes for the rich, deregulated the finance industry, privatised the railways, telecommunications and other industries and implemented tens of thousands of redundancies.

In its "Briefing to the Incoming Government" two months ago, the NZI advised Jacinda Ardern's government to deepen its attack on workers by slashing the minimum wage "and re-introduc[ing] lower youth minimum wage rates." It called for the reinstatement of charter schools to cut education spending, and for lifting the age of pension eligibility by two years.

The elevation of fascistic politicians and policies internationally, including in the US, Brazil, India, Hungary, France and the Philippines, is part of the ruling-class response to the unprecedented growth of class tensions, exacerbated by the pro-corporate response to the pandemic and the economic crisis.

Similar developments are underway in New Zealand. From 2017 to 2020, the Labour Party governed in a coalition with the Greens and the right-wing nationalist New Zealand First Party, which repeatedly agitated against Chinese, Indian and other immigrants, and demonised Muslims in terms like those used by Tarrant and Smith.

The Labour government's anti-immigrant policies are intended to divert workers' anger over soaring unemployment and the housing crisis. It has also promoted militarism, defending NZ and Australian war crimes in Afghanistan and strengthened New Zealand's integration into US war plans against China. The views espoused by Smith, no less than the Christchurch terrorist, reflect this broader political environment.

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