

New Zealand: Two years since the Christchurch far-right terrorist attack

Tom Peters**16 March 2021**

March 15 marked the second anniversary of the Christchurch terrorist attack, in which fascist gunman Brenton Tarrant murdered 51 men, women and children in mass shootings at two mosques, and injured 40 others.

The 2019 massacre was the worst in New Zealand's history and its brutality shocked billions of people around the world. The terrorist filmed and broadcast his slaughter on the internet, with the aim of inciting others to violence.

At a public remembrance service in Christchurch on Saturday, the names of the dead were read out, and spokespersons for the bereaved families gave speeches. Maha Elmadani, whose father was killed, said: "His death, and that of all the shuhada (martyrs) has left behind a heartache that can never be healed and an emptiness that can never be filled.

"The pain of losing these 51 lives not only impacted the people of Christchurch, the pain ripped through New Zealand and the rest of the world and continues to be felt."

Survivors are suffering severe psychological trauma and many have debilitating and potentially life-threatening injuries.

Ahmed Yesuf, a young father shot in the Al Noor mosque, told TVNZ: "There's not a single day I don't remember the 15 March... When I go to the cemetery I feel I belong there as well. I was nearly one of them and sometimes I feel like I wish I died that day." The bullet fragments lodged in Yesuf's body are slowly poisoning him with lead. He could have them surgically removed, but the operation would risk leaving him permanently disabled.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told Saturday's service she wanted a "more inclusive nation" that is "proud of our diversity." She declared: "In the

aftermath of March 15 we have learned so much. We've been willing to ask ourselves some incredibly hard questions. We have confronted, and continue to confront our laws, our systems, our bureaucracy, and things are changing and will continue to change."

In reality, the government has washed its hands of any responsibility for the political environment in which Tarrant's fascist views developed. Successive Labour and National Party governments stoked Islamophobia by taking part in the illegal US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The right-wing nationalist New Zealand First Party, which played a major role in Ardern's Labour Party-led coalition government from 2017 to 2020, had repeatedly expressed racist and anti-Muslim positions similar to those in Tarrant's manifesto. Labour adopted NZ First's anti-immigrant policies; both parties scapegoated immigrants for social inequality, the erosion of public services and the rising cost of living, fuelled by the government's pro-business policies.

Tarrant's manifesto also expressed his admiration for then-US president Donald Trump, who he called a "symbol of white renewal." To prevent public discussion about these parallels with the right-wing policies of governments and political parties, NZ's chief censor banned possession of the document.

A royal commission of inquiry into the attack whitewashed the police and spy agencies which, in both Australia and New Zealand, dismissed or turned a blind eye to warnings that could have led to Tarrant's arrest. The commissioners stated that Tarrant acted alone, despite his known links with Australian and European fascist groups. All the evidence submitted to the inquiry by government agencies has been kept secret.

Andrew Little, the minister leading the government response to the inquiry, recently released a report

summarising 33 “community engagement” meetings with Muslim groups. Many participants expressed “concerns” that no state agency or official has been held accountable for failing to stop the attack. Ministers were also told that Muslims continue to feel unsafe and distrust the intelligence agencies—which have spied on and harassed Muslims for decades.

In comments published by Radio NZ, one attendee described the meetings as an empty “box-ticking exercise.” Another said: “The few participants who were allowed to speak were given an enforced two-minute opportunity, which were each responded to without time limit by the ministers. Responses from the ministers were often defensive and accusatory.”

The ongoing danger of far-right violence was highlighted on March 4, when police arrested a 27-year-old Christchurch man for threatening to bomb the mosques targeted by Tarrant. The man’s name has been suppressed after he appeared in court and was remanded in custody.

Alarmingly, despite the threat being posted on the well-known website 4chan, police and intelligence agencies claimed they did not see it. Police were alerted to the threat by a member of the public.

In Australia, the second anniversary of the massacre committed by an Australian terrorist was ignored by political leaders and most of the media. Brief reports were buried under an avalanche of coverage about government sex scandals.

An Islamic preacher in Melbourne, Molla Mohammad Rashidul Huq, told SBS the massacre had a “huge” impact in Australia. “Many Muslims have now stopped going to the mosque. And those who do, are very scared and fear what if someday such an attack takes place on Australian soil,” he said.

The Australian National Socialist Network (formerly the Lads Society) shares Tarrant’s fascist ideology and in 2016 its leader Thomas Sewell tried to recruit him as a member. Sewell was arrested earlier this month for brutally assaulting a security guard outside Channel Nine’s offices in Melbourne, apparently in retaliation for the media company’s reporting on the NSN.

The Australian and New Zealand governments have exploited the Christchurch atrocity to further expand the state’s repressive powers. The Christchurch Call to Action, initiated by the Ardern government, encouraged tech companies and governments to censor online

content deemed “extremist.”

This has nothing to do with combating the far-right. The French government of Emmanuel Macron, which hosted the Christchurch Call summit in May 2019, recently passed an “anti-separatist” law.

Other signatories to the Christchurch Call—including Switzerland, India and Sri Lanka—have also introduced anti-democratic and anti-Muslim legislation.

The obvious aim of such measures is to strengthen racist and nationalist tendencies, and prepare the state apparatus to confront mass opposition to inequality, poverty, war and the refusal of governments to control the coronavirus pandemic. Trump’s attempted fascist coup on January 6, abetted by elements within the US military and police, is only the most striking example of the growing danger of fascist dictatorship internationally.

The events of recent years, and the entire history of the twentieth century, demonstrate that this threat cannot be stopped by appeals to the powers-that-be. The fight against fascism requires a revolutionary socialist strategy to unite the international working class to abolish capitalism.



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