

New Zealand and France host “Christchurch Call” summit to expand internet censorship

Tom Peters
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Last weekend, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron hosted an online meeting of world leaders and technology company executives, for the second anniversary summit of the Christchurch Call to Action.

The initiative is portrayed as the response by Ardern’s Labour Party government, and governments throughout the world, to the massacre of 51 people by fascist terrorist Brenton Tarrant, at two mosques in Christchurch on March 15, 2019. Ardern declared at the summit: “My hope is that the work we do will prevent others from suffering the same impacts.”

Its real aim is to promote mechanisms for governments and tech companies to increase their ability to censor online content that they deem to be promoting terrorism or “violent extremism.” What counts as extremism is determined by the state.

The real target is not the far-right, but left-wing and socialist organisations and individuals. In every country, the ruling class is building up police state powers in preparation for suppressing mass opposition from the working class to austerity, war preparations, and the murderous policies that have allowed the COVID-19 pandemic to spread, killing millions of people.

There are now 55 countries supporting the Christchurch Call, including the United States, India, Australia, Japan and the UK. In a joint statement on May 8, Ardern and Macron welcomed the recent decision by US President Joe Biden’s administration to officially endorse the initiative. Ardern declared that “having the US government on board will further strengthen actions to reduce the risk of the internet being used as a tool for terrorists... It also recognises the importance of protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms online.”

Biden administration spokesperson Jen Psaki told the media: “Countering the use of the internet by terrorists and violent extremists to radicalise and recruit is a significant priority” for the US.

The hypocrisy of these statements is underscored by Biden’s defence of the Israeli military’s murderous assault on Palestinian civilians in Gaza, on the bogus grounds that Israel has a “right to self-defence” against “terrorism.”

Macron described the US as “a critically important ally in shared efforts against terrorism and violent extremism.” In fact, the former Trump administration actively encouraged right-wing extremists, who stormed the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021, in an attempt to overturn the election result. Military leaders and law enforcement agencies took no action to prevent the violent rampage, which was openly planned through social media. The Biden administration is continuing to work collaboratively with the right-wing and fascistic Republican Party members who backed the assault.

Moreover, for the past two decades, the US and its allies have waged a series of criminal imperialist wars, including the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, accompanied by widespread torture, mass surveillance and other attacks on democratic rights, using the pretext of a “war on terror.”

The leading role played by France in the Christchurch Call further exposes the fraud that the initiative has anything to do with protecting minorities from far-right violence. The Macron government is inciting anti-Muslim bigotry, by campaigning against mosques and promoting “anti-separatism” laws that will ban the use of headscarves by government employees, and make it easier for the state to ban religious or political organisations. Significant sections

of the French military, emboldened by the government's actions, are threatening to carry out a coup to stop the "Islamisation" of the country.

Despite the events of January 6 and other far-right and racist attacks internationally since 2019—many inspired by Trump and other capitalist politicians—Arden declared that the Christchurch Call has been a success, saying: "I have no doubt that progress to date has already made it harder for those pushing terrorist or violent extremist content online."

Arden and Macron both praised the US-based tech giants that are part of the Christchurch Call, including Amazon, Facebook, Google, YouTube and Twitter. These corporations, which are working together in the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), are engaged in sweeping censorship, primarily targeting left-wing, socialist and anti-war publications—especially the *World Socialist Web Site*. Last October, Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google's parent company Alphabet, admitted to censoring the WSWS by burying its articles in search results.

In January this year, Facebook carried out a purge of accounts linked to the Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS, and other left-wing pages. The social media giant has also taken down WSWS articles exposing the US media's propaganda blaming China for the coronavirus pandemic.

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Arden said "the biggest focus" for the Christchurch Call, at present, was the "ethical use of algorithms... how they can be used in a positive way and for positive interventions." Speaking to Radio NZ, she said a royal commission of inquiry into the 2019 terror attack found that Tarrant "accessed content that led to what you could assume would be further radicalisation," meaning that social media and YouTube algorithms steered him towards extremist material.

YouTube's chief executive Susan Wojcicki tweeted in response that YouTube would continue to "restrict borderline content"—a euphemism for anything which goes against the US corporate media's narrative.

The Christchurch royal commission's report falsely portrayed the attack as the work of an isolated individual, radicalised via the internet. It downplayed his extensive links with fascist groups in Australia and Europe, and failed to explain how Tarrant was able to

spend two years planning his attack and then carry it out without being stopped. The report whitewashed the role of intelligence agencies and the police, in New Zealand and Australia. At the very least, these agencies turned a blind eye to the threat posed by violent fascists, and specific warnings that should have led to Tarrant's arrest.

The royal commission's findings also covered up the political responsibility of Trump—whom Tarrant idolised—and successive Australian and New Zealand governments, which have stoked xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment, including to justify participation in the US "war on terror." The Arden government is scapegoating foreigners for the social crisis and whipping up nationalism to prepare the population for future wars, all of which fuel the growth of the far-right.

In the week before the Christchurch Call summit, thousands of migrants protested across New Zealand against the government's brutal anti-immigrant policies, which have been largely adopted from Labour and the Greens' former coalition partner, the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party. Australia recently followed New Zealand in imposing a discriminatory ban on any inbound flights from India, leaving thousands of Australian citizens stranded and unable to return home.

Over the past two years, New Zealand and Australia have passed anti-democratic laws, aimed at boosting the powers of the state to force social media companies to take down online content more rapidly. These measures, like all those advocated by the Christchurch Call, are intended to crack down on growing working-class opposition to attacks on their rights and living standards.



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