

Four members of a Muslim family killed in London, Ontario terrorist atrocity

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Four members of a Muslim family in London, Ontario were brutally slain Sunday night in a hit-and-run attack that police have described as “premeditated” and motivated by “hate” towards Islam and Muslims.

Police have revealed next to nothing about what they know about the far-right political views and connections of the 20-year-old assailant, Nathaniel Veltman. But they have characterized his murderous attack as a “hate crime” and have said they are considering adding “terrorism charges” to the four counts of murder and one of attempted murder laid against him on Monday.

The victims, whom Veltman struck at high speed with his black pickup truck at 8:40 p.m. Sunday while they were out for a stroll, are 46-year-old Salman Afzaal, his unnamed 74-year-old mother, his 44-year-old wife, Madiha Salman, and their 15-year-old daughter, Yumna Afzaal. Fayez Afzaal, aged nine, survived the attack and remains in hospital with serious injuries.

Salman reportedly came from Pakistan and was a well-known member of the Muslim community in London, which is one of Canada’s oldest. Danveer Chaudry, a family friend, said Salman was involved in community work at the local mosque. “He was a very humble guy, always there for the community. I feel sorry that we were not in touch in the last year because of COVID. When I heard this tragedy, my heart is in so much pain and sorrow,” he told CBC.

The authorities have said the assailant was wearing a body armour-style vest when he was detained by police 10 minutes after the attack. But as of yesterday afternoon, almost 48 hours after his arrest, they have said nothing about his background, including whether he was employed, unemployed or a student, had ties to a far-right group, or made any statement on his arrest.

A Reuters report released Monday night noted that relatives of the deceased had released a statement saying that Veltman’s attack was supported by a group with which he was associated. However, neither their statement nor any other publicly available report has identified the group.

Although details about Veltman’s past and political views

are being kept strictly under wraps, the fact that the police are even considering terrorism charges indicates that substantial evidence of his association with the far right must be in their possession.

Adopted on the pretext of the 9/11 attacks, Canada’s draconian anti-terrorism laws have been invoked multiple times against Islamist extremists, including those entrapped by state agents. But Crown prosecutors and the police-security agencies have generally declined to bring terrorism charges against fascist and other far-right assailants.

For example, Alexandre Bissonnette, who killed six Muslims in an armed assault on the Quebec City mosque in January 2017, was convicted on six charges of first-degree murder. However, he faced no terrorism charges, even though his far-right convictions, including support for Trump and the French neo-fascist Marine Le Pen and hatred of Muslims, were well established.

Canadian political leaders acknowledged the political character of Veltman’s bloody crime. “This killing was no accident,” declared Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a Tuesday House of Commons speech. “This was a terrorist attack.” He placed Veltman’s murderous rampage in the context of the Quebec City mosque shooting, the murder of a man at an Ontario mosque last September, and the harassment of black Muslim women in Edmonton, Alberta. He vowed to “dismantle far-right groups” and pointed to the government’s placing of the Proud Boys on Canada’s terrorism watch list as proof of its readiness to act.

New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh declared that the attack had its source in “pervasive racism” in Canada. “The reality is this is our Canada,” Singh said. “How many more families will be killed before we do something? Another family can’t be mauled down in the streets and nothing happens. Muslims are not safe in this country.”

Behind these crocodile tears, the representatives of the political establishment are unwilling and incapable of acknowledging that the rise of Islamophobia and far-right forces is a direct product of the foreign and domestic policies pursued and supported by all parties in parliament.

Contrary to Singh's fatuous attempt to blame the entire population for anti-Muslim hysteria and discrimination with references to "our Canada," the reality is that these reactionary sentiments have been systematically stoked and deployed to deadly effect by the Canadian ruling class.

Taking the neocolonial invasion and occupation of Afghanistan as a starting point, Canadian imperialism has been engaged in almost perpetual war for the past 20 years. Canada's involvement in the US-led onslaughts against Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria have not only brutalized Canadian society, conveying the impression that all problems can be overcome by resorting to military force and high-powered firearms, but facilitated the eruption of virulent Islamophobia at home. This has proceeded in tandem with a savage assault on social spending and the gutting of democratic rights, including workers' right to strike, which has ratcheted up social tensions to the breaking point, accelerated the growth of social inequality and created urban landscapes dominated by mass poverty and precarious employment.

To enforce this class war agenda against widespread social opposition, sections of the ruling elite have cultivated direct ties with far-right groups. This includes the use of fascistic thugs by company management at the Federated Cooperatives Ltd. oil refinery in Saskatchewan to intimidate locked out workers.

The Canadian ruling class's response to the COVID-19 pandemic epitomizes the brutality of contemporary capitalist society. It has systemically prioritized profits over lives. While more than 25,000 Canadians have lost their lives to COVID-19, the country's 48 billionaires have gained \$78 billion in wealth during the 16-month-long pandemic.

Far-right forces, like Maxime Bernier's People's Party and the right-wing populist Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ), which currently forms Quebec's provincial government, have undoubtedly spearheaded the demonization of the Muslim population. In 2015, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper, in which Bernier served, proposed setting up a "barbaric cultural practices" snitch line targeting Muslims. In 2019, the CAQ, to wide applause from Quebec's ruling elite, adopted legislation, Bill 21, that attacks religious minorities, and especially Muslim women, by prohibiting the wearing of "religious signs" by public sector workers, including teachers, in "positions of authority;" and by denying public services, including health care and education, to observant women who wear the burka or niqab.

If these chauvinist and far-right forces have been able to act with such aggressiveness, it is because the discriminatory measures they propose have been given credibility and even endorsed by forces on the so-called "left." For more than a

decade Québec Solidaire, a pseudo-left party that supports Quebec independence, described the reactionary debate over "excessive accommodation" to immigrants and minorities out of which Bill 21 emerged as "necessary." And while Singh took potshots Tuesday at "politicians" who "have used Islamophobia for political gain," the reality is that his own NDP is the linchpin propping up the Trudeau minority government. A government that has continued and expanded Canada's participation in US aggression and war in the Middle East and intensified its collaboration, under both Trump and Biden, with the fascistic Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the United States to stop refugees fleeing poverty and American imperialist violence from seeking asylum in Canada.

Trudeau and Singh's bluster about fighting the far right is a fraud. The Trudeau government has played a central role in ignoring and downplaying the extensive evidence of far-right activities in the Canadian Armed Forces. When a far-right military reservist sought to assassinate Trudeau last July, the incident was trivialized and the assailant faced only minor weapons charges.

These processes are not unique to Canada. Far-right terrorists, nourished by the imperialist-led wars of aggression targeting predominantly Muslim countries and the discrimination and abuse against immigrants and refugees perpetrated by the major powers, have targeted Muslims around the world. The deadliest of these far-right rampages include the brutal shooting spree by fascist terrorist Brenton Tarrant in Christchurch, New Zealand, which claimed the lives of 51 people in two mosques in March 2019, and the July 2011 massacre by Anders Behring Breivik of 77 people, most of whom were members of the Labour Party's youth movement.



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