

New Zealand's Daily Blog glorifies fascist killer Kyle Rittenhouse

Tom Peters
9 December 2021

In the latest sign of the stampede to the right by New Zealand's *Daily Blog*, its editor Martyn Bradbury wrote an article on November 24 defending Kyle Rittenhouse, who was recently acquitted of murdering two people and attempting to murder a third at a protest against police racism and violence in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The acquittal of the teenage gunman has outraged millions of workers and youth around the world. The WSWs warned that the verdict, following a trial that was a travesty of justice, "will serve to embolden violent fascist militias being cultivated around Trump and the Republican Party."

Rittenhouse has visited Donald Trump and been offered internships by at least three Republican politicians. He has been glorified by Fox News, Breitbart, the neo-Nazi *Daily Stormer*, and in New Zealand, by right-wing blogger Cameron Slater and the fascist group Action Zealanda.

Yet, in his thoroughly rancid article, Bradbury sided himself, and the *Daily Blog*, with Rittenhouse's false claim of "self-defence," presenting the shooter as an innocent victim of violent rioters.

The blog is a prominent publication of New Zealand's ex-left or "liberal" milieu, orbiting the Labour Party-led government and trade unions. Its regular contributors include Unite union leader Mike Treen, former Alliance Party MP Liz Gordon, former NZ First member Curwen Rolinson, former Mana Party member John Minto, and liberal columnist Chris Trotter. None of these people have distanced themselves from Bradbury's embrace of Rittenhouse.

Bradbury's account omits the context of the entire case: the shootings occurred during a wave of the largest demonstrations in American history, which saw an estimated 15 to 26 million people take to the streets following the murder of George Floyd to protest the epidemic of police killings and official cover-ups. President Trump demanded a crackdown on the protests,

and police and far-right vigilantes ran riot across the country.

On the night of August 25, 2020, the then 17-year-old Rittenhouse travelled to Kenosha and armed himself with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, responding to a social media post by the Kenosha Guard, a "patriotic" vigilante group that was welcomed by local police officers.

Rittenhouse first shot Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, three times, killing him. Anthony Huber, 26, was shot dead after he struck Rittenhouse with a skateboard in a heroic attempt to protect others from the shooter. Gaige Grosskreutz, a medic, was shot in the arm and suffered a gruesome wound, after he unsuccessfully tried to disarm Rittenhouse.

Bradbury says Rittenhouse was "always going to get off these charges because it was always self defense." This turns reality on its head. It was the protesters who had the right to defend themselves against an armed and unstable right-wing thug.

Bradbury takes his cue from Judge Schroeder, who blocked any discussion of Rittenhouse's political ideology and motivation during his trial. Prosecutors were not allowed to refer to those he shot as "victims" or even "alleged victims," but defence lawyers could demonise them as "looters" and "rioters."

Bradbury makes no mention of Rittenhouse's ardent support for Trump, or his association with the Proud Boys. While on bail, Rittenhouse was photographed celebrating in a bar with members of the fascist gang and making "white power" hand gestures.

The *Daily Blog* repeats the main talking points from the far-right. Bradbury demonizes Rosenbaum and Huber by raising their past criminal records, basically implying that they got what they deserved. He then presents their killer as an upstanding citizen unfairly targeted by "woke character assassination."

He claims that on the night of the shootings Rittenhouse

was “offering medical help to protestors and protecting businesses after spending the day cleaning graffiti off the school. He was confronted by people with guns and weapons who attacked him.”

In fact, Rosenbaum and Huber were both unarmed, and while Grosskreutz was armed with a handgun, he did not shoot, but had his arm blown apart by Rittenhouse. The shooter’s claim that he was a trained medic was false.

According to Bradbury, however, the main issue highlighted by the Rittenhouse case is that “17-year-olds think the only option is taking to the streets with machine guns because the police have walked away.” This echoes the Fox News host Tucker Carlson’s notorious statement following the shootings: “How shocked are we that 17-year-olds with rifles decided they had to maintain order when no one else would?”

The Rittenhouse verdict will be used to normalize fascist gangsters, armed to the teeth, showing up at left-wing protests and gatherings to “maintain order.” They will terrorize and shoot people, confident of protection from reactionary judges and the political establishment.

As in the 1930s, the promotion of right-wing vigilantism is a conscious response by sections of the ruling class internationally to the growth of working class opposition to capitalist policies that are leading to mass deaths from COVID-19, soaring social inequality and police brutality.

The sympathy for Rittenhouse expressed by the *Daily Blog*, and ex-left commentators like Glenn Greenwald and Jimmy Dore, reflects the shifting moods among sections of the affluent middle class. Hostile to the emerging movement in the working class and to a fight for socialism, and determined to keep their own privileged position under capitalism, this layer is being swept up in the general lurch to the right.

In New Zealand, the *Daily Blog* is contributing to an increasingly toxic atmosphere. As in other countries, far-right protests have emerged, demanding “freedom” from public health restrictions and vaccine mandates. While these forces lack popular support, they are being encouraged by sections of the media and political establishment. *Daily Blog* contributor John Minto sought to legitimise one recent protest by the fundamentalist Destiny Church, saying it raised “genuine, valid concerns.”

The Labour Party-led government has already succumbed to pressure to abandon its elimination strategy for COVID-19. With the support of the trade unions, it has promised to end all lockdowns so that businesses can

fully resume the extraction of profits from the working class, even as the deadly virus spreads across the country.

The *Daily Blog* supports this dangerous and criminal reopening drive. At the same time, Bradbury has also promoted the conspiracy theory started by Trump supporters that the coronavirus leaked from a laboratory in Wuhan—a lie aimed at scapegoating China for the pandemic and whipping up nationalist, pro-war sentiment.

More broadly, the publication supports a Labour government and trade union bureaucracy that is responsible for widening social inequality and poverty. The multi-million dollar handouts to corporations, and the Reserve Bank’s quantitative easing during the pandemic, combined with inadequate support for workers, have fuelled a housing crisis and a major increase in people relying on charities for food. While the trade unions suppress opposition from the working class, the fascist right seeks to exploit these conditions for its own gain.

The far-right has also been emboldened by the government’s constant attacks on immigrants and its efforts to scapegoat foreigners for the social crisis. The *Daily Blog*, which has posted numerous anti-immigrant articles, enthusiastically promoted Labour’s 2017-2020 coalition government with the right-wing nationalist and anti-Asian NZ First Party.

As in the US, the entire political establishment is complicit in creating the conditions that carry the real danger of far-right violence. Far from being isolated from such threats, New Zealand experienced one of the worst fascist terror attacks in March 2019, when Brenton Tarrant, an admirer of Trump with links to extreme right groups internationally, massacred 51 people at two Christchurch mosques.

As was the case in the last century, workers and young people seeking to fight against fascism must take up a conscious political struggle against capitalism, which is the source of the social crisis, the disastrous response to the pandemic, nationalism and war. This means fighting for socialism and internationalism, in opposition to the Labour government and its backers, including those promoting nationalist and outright pro-fascist poison via the *Daily Blog*.



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