

New Zealand government barely acknowledges anniversary of Christchurch far-right terror attack

Tom Peters
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Yesterday marked four years since the devastating mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in which 51 people were killed and 40 injured. The victims included men, women and children; the youngest killed was a three-year-old boy.

The fascist gunman, Brenton Tarrant, made clear in his manifesto that the atrocity was motivated by white supremacist, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim beliefs.

The events of March 15, 2019, shocked the world. In the days following the attack tens of thousands attended vigils in solidarity with the victims and against racist violence and terror in New Zealand, Australia and many other countries.

Notably, the fourth anniversary of New Zealand's worst-ever mass shooting passed without any public commemoration by the Labour Party-led government. There was no statement delivered in parliament and not even a press release from Prime Minister Chris Hipkins marking the occasion.

According to the *New Zealand Herald*, Hipkins sent a video message to the victims' families yesterday. His office told the newspaper that March 15 "will always remain close to the hearts of New Zealanders, including the Prime Minister."

Former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who resigned in January, also remained silent yesterday, declining an interview request by Radio NZ's "Morning Report."

As with previous anniversaries, Australia's Labor government made no comment on the worst terrorist attack carried out by one of its citizens. Tarrant had links with the Australian neo-Nazi groups, the Lads Society and United Patriots Front (UPF), whose leading members are still active.

The silence from the political establishment, and the superficial coverage in the corporate media, is aimed at obscuring the roots of the Christchurch terror attack and downplaying the danger posed by fascism internationally and in New Zealand.

In a perspective published three days after the attack, the *World Socialist Web Site* opposed the attempts that were already being made to portray Tarrant as a "lone wolf," unconnected to any political tendencies, whose actions and beliefs were completely alien to New Zealand politics and society.

The attack, we insisted, had to be taken as a deadly warning by the international working class. "It is the product of the deliberate cultivation, at the highest levels of the capitalist state in country after country, of the most extreme right-wing nationalism. As the

working class internationally comes forward in a mass resurgence of class struggle against unprecedented levels of social inequality and the danger of war, the ruling class is once again, as it did in the 1920s and 1930s, seeking to use fascist forces to divide, intimidate and suppress the opposition to the bankruptcy of capitalism and the nation-state system."

In Germany, open fascists had been brought into parliament for the first time since World War II, and the country was rearming for war. In the United States, President Donald Trump was building the far-right movement that would ultimately carry out an attempted insurrection in Washington on January 6, 2021.

"In Australia and New Zealand," we said, "where politicians are making hypocritical statements condemning racism and violence, the establishment has, since 2001, demonised Muslim refugees as a threat and potential terrorist fifth column, and blamed immigration for every social problem."

Ardern was glorified in the international media for her supposedly sympathetic response to the attack, despite the fact that Labour's coalition partner at the time was the extreme right-wing New Zealand First Party, well-known for its anti-immigrant, anti-Asian and Islamophobic positions. The Labour Party itself had called for cuts to immigration as a major part of its campaign for the 2017 election.

For these reasons, the Ardern government moved quickly to impose strict limits on public discussion about the significance of the attack. Possession of Tarrant's manifesto was made a crime in New Zealand. Journalists had to apply to the Office of the Censor to see the document and were warned that reporting on its contents could violate the law.

The WSWs condemned this as a major attack on democratic rights, aimed at concealing the glaring similarities between Tarrant's views and those of capitalist parties in New Zealand and Australia, and political leaders like Trump, whom Tarrant praised as a symbol of "white renewal."

Ardern also instructed the media not to report any statements Tarrant made about his beliefs and motivations in the event of a trial. The country's main media organisations signed an unprecedented agreement to self-censor their coverage. A trial did not proceed after Tarrant pled guilty.

The ban did not prevent the manifesto, along with Tarrant's video of his attack, from circulating widely in far-right circles. The

Christchurch massacre helped inspire other right-wing terrorists, including Patrick Wood Crusius, who murdered 23 people in El Paso, Texas in August 2019, and Payton Gendron, who killed 10 people in Buffalo, New York in May last year.

The “Great Replacement” theory outlined in the manifesto, according to which Jews are bringing about mass immigration to “replace” the white population, is now central to the propaganda of the Republican Party and right-wing media in the United States.

Politicians in New Zealand have also put forward versions of this racist theory. In highly publicised anti-immigrant rants in 2019 and 2020, government minister Shane Jones, a member of NZ First, railed against declining “birth rates” which, combined with immigration, was supposedly threatening New Zealand’s “identity.” Media commentators never pointed out that Jones’ fixation on birth rates directly echoed Tarrant’s manifesto.

There is no mass fascist movement in New Zealand. NZ First is deeply unpopular in the working class and failed to win any seats in parliament in the 2020 election. But the actions of the Labour government, like its counterparts internationally, have significantly emboldened extreme right-wing, anti-immigrant and fascistic organisations.

A number of these groups, including the New Conservatives, Destiny Church and Voices for Freedom, occupied parliament’s lawn early last year demanding the removal of all COVID-19 vaccine mandates and other public health measures. NZ First, the ACT Party and sections of the media encouraged the occupation. The government, which had already abandoned its previous policy of eliminating COVID, essentially adopted the program of the far-right, allowing the virus to spread and kill more than 3,000 people over the past year.

The government’s support for US imperialism’s proxy war against Russia has included sending millions of dollars to the Ukrainian military, in which far-right forces play a prominent role. New Zealand troops are currently in Britain helping to train Ukrainian soldiers for the war. The NZ media and universities have whitewashed Ukraine’s fascist militias, such as the Azov battalion, and the fact that the Zelensky regime openly celebrates Nazi collaborators as national heroes.

The Nazi Black Sun that Tarrant had on his bag during his attack is one of the symbols used by the Azov movement. Tarrant visited Ukraine and had considered moving there prior to the Christchurch attack. His mother would later tell the police she was alarmed at hearing this, because of Ukraine’s well-known right-wing extremist subculture.

To this day, there remain many unanswered questions about how Tarrant was able to plan and carry out his attack, without being stopped by police or the intelligence agencies.

There has been no public inquiry into the attack. A royal commission was held in 2020, but its hearings took place in secret and the vast majority of the evidence that it examined has been sealed. A separate coronial inquiry has been announced but its hearings are being repeatedly delayed.

The royal commission’s report covered up the role of the state agencies, declaring that nothing could have been done to prevent the attack. This is despite the fact that Tarrant was active in far-right online forums and had been reported to police in Australia for

sending death threats via Facebook to an opponent of the fascist UPF.

In New Zealand, a member of Tarrant’s gun club near Dunedin raised concerns with police about the racist and anti-Muslim comments made by members of the club. If these and other warnings, including threats sent to NZ Muslim organisations, had been investigated, the massacre might have been prevented.

The government’s main response to the attack has been to vastly expand the resources of the Office of the Censor and the spy agencies. Ardern also launched the Christchurch Call to Action, an initiative involving over 120 governments and tech companies including Twitter, Google, Microsoft and Facebook, ostensibly to work out mechanisms to “eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online.”

This is a fraud. Online censorship is used primarily not against the far-right, but to attack the democratic rights of working people who are seeking to oppose ever-widening social inequality and militarism. The tech giants are already engaged in constant censorship of socialist content, especially the *World Socialist Web Site*, while promoting pro-war propaganda from the corporate media.

It is noteworthy that alongside Ardern, French President Emmanuel Macron has played a leading role in the Christchurch Call. His government is notorious for attacking the rights of Muslims and immigrants, and for defending police violence against striking workers.

The experiences of the last four years, in NZ and internationally, confirm the warnings made by the WWSWS that the threat of fascism cannot be countered by appealing to the capitalist parties and the state—the very institutions that are systematically promoting the far-right, as they did throughout the twentieth century, to divide the working class and defend capitalist rule.

Fascism can only be defeated through the fight to unify working people of all countries on the basis of a socialist program, to abolish the root cause of war and social inequality: the profit system and its division of the world into rival nation states.



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