

Secretive overhaul of New Zealand terror law targets protests

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New Zealand's far-right government is secretly preparing an overhaul of the Terrorism Suppression Act, under which people who publicly express support for "terrorist" groups could be charged with a criminal offence, according to a leaked document reported by *Newsroom* on July 22.

The Terrorism Suppression Act was legislated in 2002 by the then Labour government following the 9/11 terror attacks in the US. It was updated and broadened on three occasions, again by Labour supported by the Greens, beginning in 2019. The Act allows the government to formally designate people or groups as terrorist entities, freezing their assets, and makes it illegal to financially support, recruit for, or participate in a designated terrorist entity.

The National Party-NZ First-ACT coalition government is now seeking to further expand the law. According to *Newsroom*, consultations are being conducted behind closed doors involving an unnamed, handpicked selection of groups and "experts." The NZ Council for Civil Liberties (NZCCL), which obtained the document, expressed alarm at both the secretive nature of the discussions and the proposed changes.

NZCCL chairperson Thomas Beagle drew parallels with the British government designating Palestine Action as a terrorist group for its peaceful activities protesting the United Kingdom's support of Israel's genocide in Gaza. "Laws that enable governments to outlaw organisations and any show of support for them are amongst the most dangerous tools the public in any democracy can give to ministers," Beagle warned.

Palestine Action was proscribed by the Starmer Labour government on July 5, making membership of or support for the group a criminal offence, punishable by up to 14 years in prison. Police have already arrested more than 300 protesters, many elderly, some for simply holding signs reading, "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action."

Beagle said the changes proposed by the New Zealand government could be similarly used to shut down organisations it did not like. "People will be criminalised not

just for being members of an organisation but for expressing support for the issue it was focused on. These are highly dangerous attacks on freedom of expression and freedom of association," he said.

Speaking to independent journalist Mick Hall, Beagle added that the NZCCL was "horrified that they [the UK] have sunk so far and so quickly." The NZ proposals, he noted, accompany a decision by the Independent Police Conduct Authority seeking to give police the power to unilaterally ban protests in the event of a "high chance of public disorder and threats to public safety."

The proposed changes are being discussed as New Zealand's allies in the Five Eyes spy network (US, Australia, the UK, and Canada) and the NATO-aligned IP4 grouping, which includes Australia, Japan and South Korea, all ramp up their internal security networks.

The fear in ruling circles is that the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the US-backed Israeli genocide in the Middle East and advanced US-led preparations for war against China will inevitably generate immense opposition.

In Australia the Albanese Labor government recently introduced legislation, without any prior notice, to make permanent and expand the compulsory questioning powers of the domestic political spy agency, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). The police-state powers overturn fundamental democratic rights, including the right to silence, the right not to incriminate oneself and the principle of no detention without charge or trial.

In New Zealand, Labour's 2019 amendment to the Terrorism Suppression Act established draconian "control orders" for people trying to re-enter the country after allegedly supporting "extremist" groups overseas. It gave authorities sweeping powers to designate any individual as a potential "terrorist" and impose severe restrictions on their rights and movements, based on unproven allegations.

The new "consultation" document declares that existing offences under the Act "don't capture the full range of behaviours or activities of concern that are part of the contemporary threat from terrorism." It proposes "targeted

amendments,” including the creation of new offences to cover activity such as “public expressions of support for a terrorist act or designated entities, for example by showing insignia or distributing propaganda or instructional material.” It also calls for “modernising” definitions for terms like “material support” to cover online forms of support.

The document urges a streamlined designation process, claiming the current system is slow and the designation period too short. It questions whether requiring the prime minister to review decisions twice is cumbersome, and whether it remains appropriate for the attorney-general to be consulted on some decisions. It seeks to improve “the timeliness of the process, by considering changes to who the decision-maker is” and to extend the renewal period for designations to five years from three at present.

There is also a proposal to develop mechanisms to identify online “terrorist” content and sanction websites if they are deemed to be “terrorist-operated.”

This reflects demands by former Labour Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern who responded to the 2019 fascist terror attack on two mosques in Christchurch that killed 51 people by calling for greater internet censorship. To coordinate censorship globally, Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron established the Christchurch Call to Action, an initiative supported by 55 governments—including the US, Germany, Britain and others which routinely denounce socialist and anti-war activism as “extremism”—and 19 tech and social media companies, including Google, Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft and X (Twitter).

Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith told *Newsroom* the new changes follow the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Christchurch attack, which called for a review of the legislation to ensure it was current and allowed agencies to operate effectively. In fact, the Commission’s report whitewashed the role of the spy agencies which had failed to detect the far-right terrorist Brenton Tarrant’s activities. It recommended “enhanced capacity and capability and a less restrictive legislative framework” for the intelligence services, strengthening their ability to spy on the population.

More money and power have since been given to these agencies to broaden their surveillance of ordinary people. The Security Intelligence Service (SIS), in its first unclassified Security Threat Assessment in 2023, expressed nervousness about the emergence of popular opposition to the established order, noting “attempts to drive social changes are becoming … commonplace.”

The SIS highlighted growing distrust for institutions, fueled by “perceptions that people are being deliberately lied to and misled; that those with power don’t have New Zealand’s best interests at heart; and that politicians are

incapable of solving the problems facing the country.” Social and economic inequalities, the report declared, are among the many factors that “we expect to contribute to the radicalisation of violent extremists in New Zealand.”

The sinister practices of the SIS were exposed with a report in April that the agency had secretly investigated Mick Hall, who was sacked by Radio NZ (RNZ) over his edits of foreign news stories that saw him publicly smeared as a “Russian agent.” Hall had made necessary factual corrections to articles about the war in Ukraine and other topics, for which he was targeted by the media, RNZ and the SIS itself for what were entirely legitimate journalistic activities.

With the support of Labour, the government also last November passed the Countering Foreign Interference Amendment Bill through its first reading in parliament. The bill, essentially aimed at China, widens the definition of “foreign interference” to cover someone who “owes allegiance” to New Zealand (e.g., a citizen) who commits an offence if it involves “improper conduct for or on behalf of a foreign power” in order to “compromise a protected New Zealand interest.” The maximum punishment is 14 years in prison.

In a little publicised visit to Wellington on July 30, US FBI Director Kash Patel, opened a new permanent agency office in the capital, targeting China. Meeting with Intelligence Agencies Minister Judith Collins and others, Patel said the office will, partnering with NZ, have responsibility across the southwest Pacific to “investigate and disrupt” activities such as terrorism, cybercrime and “foreign intelligence threats.”

The population is deliberately being kept in the dark about the chilling attacks on basic democratic rights. The ongoing expansion of its draconian laws is a blunt warning of the escalating political suppression and censorship as the government further commits itself, in defiance of widespread anti-war sentiment, to what would be a catastrophic global war involving nuclear-armed powers.



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