

# Seven years after the fascist massacre in Christchurch

Tom Peters  
18 March 2026

March 15 marked seven years since New Zealand's deadliest mass shooting, in which 51 Muslim worshippers were murdered at the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, by fascist Brenton Tarrant.

Those killed included four children, the youngest just 3 years old. Another 40 people were injured, some with multiple and debilitating gunshot wounds. The terrorist attack inflicted severe trauma on Muslim communities in New Zealand, and produced profound shock across the world.

Tarrant broadcast his massacre live over the internet and issued a manifesto with the aim of sparking other racist attacks. Mass shooters who have cited Tarrant as an inspiration include John Earnest, who killed one person and wounded three at a synagogue in Poway, California (April 2019); Patrick Crusius, who killed 23 people at a Walmart in El Paso (August 2019); and Payton Gendron, who murdered 10 black people in Buffalo, New York (May 2022).

Notwithstanding all the official claims that Tarrant acted alone and did not represent any broader movement, he was motivated by the same fascistic and white supremacist ideology that has been systematically promoted by far-right governments in the US and elsewhere. The "great replacement" conspiracy theory, which was central to Tarrant's manifesto and states that white people are being deliberately "replaced" by immigrants, is promoted by the Trump administration in the United States. Like Tarrant, Trump and his henchmen refer to non-white immigrants as "invaders" in order to justify violent mass arrests, imprisonment and deportation.

The anniversary of the mass shooting in New Zealand passed with minimal media coverage. A few hundred people attended a commemorative event in Christchurch. Dr Hamimah Ahmat, whose husband Zekeriya Tuyan was killed, told the crowd that families and friends of the victims "continue to live through and go through the memory of March 15th."

Rosemary Omar, whose son Tariq was killed at Al Noor Mosque, told Radio NZ that she felt politicians had abandoned the families: "I don't believe they have any concept of what families have been through. There appears to be no compassion."

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon did not attend the memorial event. He posted a brief message on social media stating that in 2019 the country "showed the world strength, compassion and unity in the face of tragedy. We honour those who were taken from us by continuing to build a country where everyone can live in peace and safety."

In Australia, where Tarrant was born and spent most of his life, Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese issued a statement declaring that "our nation stands united with Muslim Australians against hatred and division" and pledging "to always speak and act clearly against Islamophobia."

These statements are profoundly hypocritical and insincere. Tarrant did not emerge from a political vacuum. He was the product of decades of anti-Muslim xenophobia and racism, stoked by governments to justify illegal

wars, including the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which successive Australian and New Zealand governments participated in.

Since the attack, both countries have further strengthened their alliances with US imperialism under the fascist president Trump, whom Tarrant idolised as "a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose." Wellington and Canberra support the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, which has now expanded into a war of annihilation against Lebanon and Iran. Trump's Secretary of War Pete Hegseth promised to wage the war "decisively, devastatingly and without mercy," raining "death and destruction from the sky all day long" with "no stupid rules of engagement"—in other words, using the genocidal methods of the Nazis.

Luxon has pointedly refused to criticise blatant US war crimes, including the bombing of an Iranian girls' school that killed more than 150 children, and the destruction of residential buildings, hospitals, desalination plants and other infrastructure.

Albanese's government is sending a warplane and missiles, along with troops, to the United Arab Emirates to join the war against Iran. Australian military personnel were also onboard a US submarine that attacked a defenceless Iranian frigate, IRIS Dena, killing 148 sailors.

Far-right, anti-Muslim parties are being emboldened and elevated in the political establishment in both countries. Labour Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who was glorified by the world's media following the attack as a supposedly kind and compassionate leader, governed in a coalition with the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, which has a long history of racist agitation against Muslim, Middle Eastern and Asian immigrants.

NZ First is now part of Luxon's coalition government, with its leader Winston Peters serving as foreign minister. Peters has repeatedly launched tirades, which would not be out of place in Tarrant's manifesto, against immigrants who "don't salute our flag," as well as pro-Palestine protesters, LGBT people and "global cultural Marxist influences."

Last September, Peters and deputy prime minister and ACT Party leader David Seymour glorified the American fascist Charlie Kirk, following his assassination—as did the Australian government and media. Kirk promoted the same "great replacement" conspiracy as Tarrant, calling it "a strategy to replace white rural America" with migrants. His many anti-Muslim statements include: "Islam is the sword the left is using to slit the throat of America."

In Australia, the racist One Nation Party is now polling more than 25 percent in some polls, feeding off the xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment promoted by the major parties. Its leader Pauline Hanson suggested last month that there are no "good Muslims" in Australia and declared that non-Islamic people feel unsafe in Lakemba, a working-class suburb in Sydney with a high proportion of Muslims. Following her statement the Lakemba Mosque received a violent threat that explicitly referenced the Christchurch terrorist attack.

Last month, West Australian police arrested Jayson Joseph Michaels, 20, and charged him with preparing to commit a terrorist act. He had allegedly planned to target Muslim places of worship across Perth, as well

as police buildings and the state parliament.

In New Zealand, police have reported a 7 percent increase in the last year in hate crimes directed towards Muslims. Federation of Islamic Associations spokesperson Abdur Razzaq told *Stuff* that in the last three months there had been three arrests for death threats.

For the past seven years public discussion of the Christchurch shooting has been deliberately suppressed. The state outlawed possession of Tarrant's manifesto and restricted reporting on its contents, in order to obscure the similarity of his positions to those of NZ First, One Nation and other parties. Ardern declared that she would never say Tarrant's name and instructed the media not to report on his statements in the event of a trial.

Many questions remain about how Tarrant was able to plan and carry out the 2019 attack without being stopped. A royal commission of inquiry in 2020 produced a report which whitewashed the intelligence agencies and the police, declaring that nothing could have been done to prevent the attack. The commission's hearings were conducted in secret and the vast majority of evidence submitted to the inquiry has been suppressed.

The royal commission sought to quash any suggestion that Tarrant was acting as part of an organised movement; its report declared that he had self-radicalised online, carried out the attack alone, with no assistance from any organisation.

There is, however, ample evidence that punctures the "lone actor" narrative. Soon after the attack it emerged that Tarrant had been in contact with members of the Australian fascist Lads Society—formerly the United Patriots Front (UPF), now rebranded as the National Socialist Network—which had tried to recruit him in 2017. He sent death threats via social media to an opponent of the UPF in 2016, which was reported at the time to police, but no action was taken.

The Lads Society's Thomas Sewell stated in a far-right social media discussion soon after the massacre that Tarrant "had been in the scene for a while."

In New Zealand, a member of the Bruce Rifle Club, where Tarrant practiced shooting, reported to police in 2017 that he had overheard disturbing anti-Muslim statements from members of the club. The royal commission accepted the claims by police that they did not receive any such complaint.

Tarrant also donated to and corresponded with far-right groups in Europe and North America. He travelled extensively, including to centres of fascist activity in Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria and the Balkans. The royal commission's report asserted that Tarrant did not meet or train with any far-right groups during his travels.

Australian investigative journalist Joey Watson, however, interviewed a source with intelligence connections in Bulgaria, who said Tarrant had trained with a right-wing "migrant hunter" vigilante group on the border with Turkey. "This was a direct contradiction of the long-held narrative about Tarrant—that he was alone," Watson stated in a podcast released last July.

Tarrant has never been publicly questioned about his activities; an interview he gave to the royal commission was suppressed.

Early last month, Tarrant spoke at length in a courtroom for the first time, seeking leave to appeal against his conviction and sentence for murder. He claimed that his guilty plea in 2020 was entered under duress, due to poor prison conditions, and was an "irrational" decision.

The Court of Appeal hearing took place amid an extraordinary level of censorship, with media outlets barred from recording the proceedings. Tarrant reportedly answered questions for three hours but hardly any of this has been published.

He told the court that when he pleaded guilty he had "put on the best front possible" to represent "the political movement I'm part of." It is unclear whether Tarrant elaborated on this statement.

The *World Socialist Web Site* applied to the Court of Appeal to view a

transcript of the hearing but this was declined. A minute dated March 17 explaining the decision stated: "Acceding to the request would be burdensome for the resources of this Court due to the extent of suppression in place."

The court has yet to rule on whether Tarrant's appeal can proceed.

A coronial inquiry is continuing into the Christchurch attack, but with a very narrow scope. The inquiry, which began in 2022, is focused on the role of online platforms in radicalising Tarrant, how he was able to obtain a gun license, and the events on the day of the attack. Coroner Brigitte Windley announced that she would not investigate whether there were "missed opportunities by intelligence, counter-terrorism agencies and other public sector agencies" to stop Tarrant—citing as her reason the "security sensitive nature of the key evidence."

The Ardern government's main response to the March 15 massacre was to boost intelligence agencies' resources and to create the Christchurch Call to Action—an initiative, backed by the US, France, Britain, Australia and many other governments, which advocates for global mechanisms to censor the internet in the name of eliminating terrorist and "violent extremist" content.

The real targets of such surveillance and censorship machinery are not the far-right, whose ideological representatives sit in parliaments across the Western world, but left-wing, socialist, and anti-war organisations. Most notably, the WSWS has been heavily censored by Google, Facebook and Twitter/X—all of which support the Christchurch Call to Action.

In Australia, meanwhile, state and federal governments have exploited the Bondi terrorist attack on a Jewish gathering last December—in which 15 people were killed by two gunmen inspired by Islamic State—to ban protests against the Gaza genocide and to smear protesters as "antisemitic." Laws passed in January will allow the government to ban political parties or organisations classified as "hate groups"—one of the most serious attacks on democratic rights in Australian history.

The working class must draw sharp political lessons from March 15, 2019, and from the seven years that have followed. The fight against fascism and Islamophobia cannot be entrusted to capitalist governments that are responsible for both and are intent on crushing opposition to war and genocide. In the US, Israel, across Europe, and in Australia and NZ, the same poisonous ideology that drove Tarrant is being systematically cultivated in order to divide working people and to justify genocidal wars.

The descent into fascism and world war can only be stopped through the conscious political mobilisation of the working class, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program uniting workers of all religions, ethnicities and nationalities against capitalism.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**