

15 years since fascist Anders Behring Breivik massacred 77 people in Norway

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Fifteen years ago, on July 22, 2011, 32-year-old fascist Anders Behring Breivik massacred 77 people on the island of Utøya and in Norway's nearby capital, Oslo. Breivik's mass murder of dozens of overwhelmingly young people attending a summer camp run by the ruling social democratic Labour Party was a political crime motivated by hatred of "communists," "cultural Marxism" and Islam that the ruling classes of Europe and North America had systematically legitimised.

The terrorist attack began in Oslo's government district, where Breivik detonated a 1-ton bomb at about 3:25 p.m. The blast killed eight people and injured dozens more. Amid the ensuing chaos, Breivik was able to leave the city unhindered and drive to the ferry crossing to Utøya. Posing as a police officer sent to protect the summer camp following the explosion, he travelled heavily armed the 600 metres by boat to the island. Upon his arrival shortly after 5 p.m., he launched a killing spree lasting almost 90 minutes that claimed the lives of 69 people. He was finally detained by the police at 6:34 p.m.

Breivik was a member of the far-right Progress Party from 1999 until about 2007, including a period when he served as a local official of the Progress Party Youth between 2002 and late 2004. He also developed ties with the English Defence League, communicating online and in-person with several members, and attending at least one demonstration in the UK.

His claim that he attended a 2002 meeting where an international fascist terrorist organisation known as the "Knights Templar" was founded in London to coordinate attacks has never been proven, but it is known that he communicated extensively online with likeminded individuals across the continent. In the intervening years, several right-wing extremist terrorists have drawn inspiration from Breivik. On July 22, 2016, the fifth anniversary of Breivik's attack, an 18-year-old right-wing extremist shot and killed nine people in Munich, specifically choosing his victims based on their appearance as immigrants, before turning the gun on himself. Brenton Tarrant, the fascist gunman who killed 51 Muslim worshippers in a mass shooting in March 2019 in Christchurch, cited Breivik as an inspiration for his actions.

Breivik meticulously prepared his massacre. He legally bought numerous firearms and travelled abroad to acquire explosives for his home-made bomb. He purchased a farm on

the outskirts of Oslo to prepare his attack. He chose the government district and Utøya as targets because they were associated with the Labour Party, which—notwithstanding its right-wing policies when in power—Breivik identified as an organisation of the left. Labour led the government at the time under Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and had held summer youth camps on Utøya for decades.

It would later emerge that the authorities failed to respond to obvious signs that Breivik was plotting mass murder. Seven months prior to the July 22, Norwegian customs flagged large quantities of explosives purchased by Breivik from Poland. In March 2011, he even notified the police that he was planning an attack, information that was allegedly not passed on to the appropriate department until after July 22. Neighbours notified the authorities of strange activity at Breivik's farm, but no action was taken.

Hours before launching his attack, Breivik sent a 1,500-page manifesto to over 1,000 contacts from far-right organisations in Norway and throughout Europe. He described himself during two calls to the police during the massacre on Utøya as a "commander in the Norwegian resistance movement against communism and the Islamisation of Europe."

Notwithstanding all of this, a concerted campaign was launched by official media outlets and politicians across Europe to portray Breivik as a "loan wolf" and deny that anyone else bore responsibility for creating the foul political and intellectual atmosphere within which his hideous crime could occur. Repeated attempts were made to declare Breivik insane, transforming his calculated political crime into the inexplicable outburst of a psychotic madman. A Norwegian court in the end ruled him fit to stand trial and sentenced him to 21 years in prison, the maximum penalty possible under Norwegian law. His sentence can, however, be extended indefinitely if a court deems Breivik remains a danger to society.

Reflecting the extent to which far-right views had been integrated into established politics already in 2011, Breivik boasted that 50 to 60 percent of his manifesto consisted of quotes and ideas taken from mainstream politicians. At his trial, he asserted, to defend his vitriolic hatred of immigrants, that "Merkel, Sarkozy, and Cameron," the heads of the German, French and British governments at the time, agreed with his

view that immigrants were the cause of society's problems.

Fifteen years later, it is no longer a matter of pointing merely to aspects of Breivik's demented world outlook that correspond with mainstream political discourse. A fascist now sits in the White House. US President Donald Trump routinely rails against "communists" and "illegal immigrants" as the greatest threat to the US, presides over a Nazi-like Gestapo in ICE that regularly murders immigrants and political opponents, and launches bloody wars of aggression without so much as a democratic fig-leaf. In February, Trump announced the beginning of the war on Iran in the dead of night like a dictator. Within hours, US forces under his command had assassinated Iran's head of state, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and other family members, and slaughtered at least 160 children aged between 7 and 12 in a missile strike on a girls' school.

In a speech delivered at Mount Rushmore on the eve of the 250th anniversary of American independence, Trump ranted that there is "a resurgence of the communist menace in our land," representing "a mortal threat to American liberty... the greatest threat to our country, including World War I, World War II, Pearl Harbor, or even 9/11."

He concluded menacingly, "You can be loyal to Karl Marx or you can be loyal to America. You can be a communist or you can be a patriot. You cannot be both."

Across Europe, far-right and outright fascist parties are either already in power or on the verge of taking it. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is an admirer of the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini and leader of the far-right Fratelli D'Italia, while in Sweden, Norway's neighbour to the east, the current right-wing government holds a parliamentary majority thanks to the votes of the Sweden Democrats, whose origins lie in the country's neo-Nazi milieu. Marine Le Pen is a serious candidate to win France's presidential election next year for the National Rally and the Alternative for Germany is likely to assume power in a German state government for the first time following elections later this year.

In Norway, Progress has become the main opposition party, finishing a few percentage points behind Labour in last year's election. While Progress sought to distance itself from Breivik and deny any responsibility for his 2011 murder spree, it has deepened the far-right agitation against immigrants and "multiculturalism" that fuelled the fascist terrorist's killing spree.

The revival of far-right and fascist politics throughout the world is inseparable from the domination of social and economic life by the financial oligarchy, and the sharpening conflicts between the major powers amid a new violent redivision of the world. Both of these features of crisis-ridden capitalism have intensified dramatically over the past 15 years.

Powerful sections of the German bourgeoisie, which was responsible for the worst crimes in human history after its embrace of fascism and Hitler, have for over a decade been waging a campaign to rewrite the history of the 20th century,

portraying Hitler and the Nazi regime's war of annihilation as a defensive measure against the Soviet Union. Leading historian Jörg Baberowski went so far as to declare that Hitler "was not vicious" and "did not want to talk about the extermination of the Jews at his table."

From the standpoint of the German ruling class, the necessity to whitewash German imperialism's past crimes and rehabilitate fascism flows from its determination to rearm for world war for the seizure of resources, cheap labour, and markets from its rivals. Above all it is to prepare counter-revolutionary violence against the working class in order to impose the savage onslaught against social gains and democratic freedoms demanded by trade and military war.

The vast majority of workers oppose fascism and everything it represents, including war, dictatorship, the persecution of immigrants and the left, and terrorist violence. However, they are prevented from fighting the growth of fascism by the parties of the official "left," which have adopted key elements of the far right's programme and smothered the class struggle with the aid of the trade union bureaucracy.

Pseudo-left parties who argue that fascism must be fought in alliance with these organisations, in a 21st-century edition of the disastrous Stalinist "popular front" policy of the 1930s, are no less complicit in paving the way to power for the fascists. The subordination of working class opposition to fascism to the supposed "democratic" bourgeoisie through the "popular front" led to the consolidation of fascist dictatorships across Europe and World War II.

The most politically appropriate way to commemorate the deaths of the dozens of young people slaughtered by Breivik is to take up the struggle for the political independence of the international working class from all factions of the bourgeoisie in the fight against the far-right danger. Workers must build new forms of democratic organisation, rank-and-file committees, to intensify the class struggle and unify globally against the capitalist profit system that gives rise to fascism and its associated horrors. The programme required to guide this struggle is socialist internationalism.



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