



Mass murder in Christchurch

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The terrorist killing of 50 Muslims and the wounding of a further 48, some critically, in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand is the latest horrifying testimony to the rise of violent racism worldwide. Though such outrages are often the work of small right extremist networks or pathological "lone wolves", the ideas that motivate them have a much larger and growing hinterland of political forces spreading hate, like Pegida in Germany, Tommy Robinson and the FLA or UKIP under Gerald Batten in Britain. Some are already in positions of great power, like Donald Trump.

The victims in Christchurch, many of them refugees, came from Syria, Jordan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. New Zealand has a tiny Muslim community, around one per cent of the total population. Yet the racists present them as a threat to "our" civilisation and pretend to be the victims. In fact, they are the victimisers and would drag us all down into barbarism if they had their way.

As with other murderous outrages, the horror was quickly followed by the hypocrisy. Hours after the attack, the New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, declared that there was "no place in New Zealand for purveyors of hate". But this is the same Ardern who brought members of New Zealand First, an overtly racist party, into her government, giving the party three cabinet posts even though it only gained 7.2 percent in the 2017 election.

The mass murderer, Brenton Harrison Tarrant, a 28-year old Australian white supremacist and neo-Nazi, livestreamed his attack on the two mosques from a helmet camera. Video clips of his exploit were soon spreading worldwide through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit. This represents a weaponising of social media, not just to spread racist ideology but to incite mass murder.

Tarrant also issued a 74 page manifesto, "The Great Replacement", two days before, copying the Norwegian neo-Nazi, mass murderer, Anders Breivik. It contained the the stock paranoid fantasies about Muslim immigration and terrorism constituting a "white genocide" and included the statement that US President Donald Trump is "a symbol of renewed white identity".

Breivik, who murdered 77 people in 2011 and who Tarrant claims to have been in contact with, has become a hero and role model for online inciters of hatred against Muslims, Jews, feminists and Black and LGBT+ people.

Rather than a mosque, Breivik's main target was a Workers' Youth League (AUF) summer camp on the island of Utøya, near Oslo. There, he killed 69 young socialists just because their organisation supported and helped refugees. He regarded his young victims as "race traitors" and his example doubtless inspired a whole series of racist killings in the years that followed.

In Britain, an identical motive seems to have spurred Thomas Mair when he shot and stabbed Labour MP Jo Cox on 16 June 2016. Cox was well known for her work in welcoming refugees and for supporting free movement. The murder took place in the last days of the Brexit campaign, which had fomented a rise of attacks on Muslims and several attempted firebombings of mosques. During his attack, Mair shouted "This is for Britain", "Keep Britain independent" and "Put Britain first".

One year later, on 19 June 2017, Darren Osborne attacked a crowd outside the Muslim Welfare House near Finsbury Park mosque in north London, killing one person.

The pattern of attacks on places of worship, however, is not exclusively aimed at Muslims. In the US, churches have long been targets for white supremacists. On the evening of June 17, 2015, a 21-year-old, Dylann Roof, gunned down nine elderly African Americans during a prayer meeting at the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina.

August 11-12, 2017, saw the Unite the Right marches in Charlottesville, Virginia, where assorted white supremacists, neo-Nazis and the Alt-Right held a torchlight march onto the university campus, chanting "Jews will not replace us" and "Our Blood Our soil". The next day, Heather Heyer was murdered by another killer, James Alex Fields Jr. Donald Trump's response was to condemn "hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides", clearly equating Fields with the antifascist counterdemonstrators, of whom Heyer was one.

On October 27, 2018, eleven people were killed and seven injured in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania by Robert D Bowers, another white supremacist, yelling "all Jews must die"!

All these atrocities, whether committed against Muslims, people of colour, Jews or migrant workers, share a common denominator; racism – a racism that easily gains traction in a prolonged period of capitalist stagnation punctuated by crises. This is all the more the case in periods when the workers' movement, thanks to its poor leadership, fails to mount resistance and to offer a real and lasting solution, not only for itself but for all the exploited and oppressed. That solution is socialism, socialism built on the foundation of workers' political power.

When certain classes, or fractions of classes, face acute social decline, but cannot, or dare not, see the real source of their insecurity and helplessness, they are easily persuaded to divert their resentment and hatred onto those more unfortunate, and in a more vulnerable position, than themselves.

The biggest danger we face today is not terrorist individuals or tiny groups of neo-Nazis but the sections of the right wing capitalist parties, the billionaire media, and the populist parties and politicians who stoke up racial hatred against Muslims, Jews, refugees, immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America or Asia.

Today, Donald Trump and his Alt-Right inspired social base, adopt and cultivate the support of the "identitarian", white supremacist, frankly fascist, forces. This can be seen in his response to Christchurch. From the White House, he called the bloodshed "a terrible thing" but denied that the racist right is a rising threat around the world, saying it is "a small group of people that have very, very serious problems".

In an interview in Breitbart this week, Trump made thinly-veiled threats of a violent confrontation with the left, by which he means his liberal critics in Congress as well as the mass resistance on the streets:

"You know, the left plays a tougher game, it's very funny. I actually think that the people on the right are tougher, but they don't play it tougher. Okay? I can tell you I have the support of the police, the support of the military, the support of the Bikers For Trump. I have the tough people, but they don't play it tough, until they go to a certain point, and then it would be very bad, very bad."

In the wake of the terrible events in New Zealand, the "responsible and respectable" media have continued the ongoing hue and cry against Facebook and the social media as though they were the origin of the poisonous racism and hate propaganda. In fact, in Britain, for example, it is the mainstream tabloids like the Daily Mail, Express and Sun, that spew out hate filled fake news and cartoons about floods of bogus refugees, "Pakistani" rapists, child molesters etc.

From the early 1900s to the end of the 1930s, the right wing media spread the vilest antisemitic propaganda, which was remarkably similar in its themes and images to the islamophobic material of today. It is from this culture of racism that both individual terrorists and racist gangs that attack immigrants emerge.

This should warn us that the spread of radical far right ideas, especially when their forces emerge from the shadows and take to the streets, need to be more effectively combatted by the left.

? Firstly, we must stop every racist and fascist attempt to mobilise to control our streets or to intimidate immigrants and target minority ethnic or religious communities. If we fail to do this they will inevitably grow into fully fascist forces that threaten the very existence of the labour movement. Wherever they march, our slogan and our practice must be No Pasaran, they shall not pass.

? Secondly, we must draw the young people, women and workers from the communities that the racists target more fully and completely into the labour movement, defending them against police and immigration officials' harassment, insisting on their right to stay, to work and to have equal access to all the benefits and rights other citizens enjoy.

? Thirdly, we have to press on with building a powerful movement, party and trade unions, fighting austerity, fighting for socialism. Only a powerful positive force can drain the swamp of racism.

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