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New Zealand

Stand with Muslims – No to Islamophobia! Down with White Supremacy!

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In the aftermath of the Christchurch terrorist attack, the International Socialist Organisation National Committee in Aotearoa/New Zealand released the following statement.

It is almost beyond comprehension. Fifty people are dead. Another 50 are injured. Hundreds, probably thousands, of people face grief, unimaginable loss. This was an attack on Muslims as Muslims, targeted at their holy places, carried out on their holy day. It was an act of terror. Our starting point is solidarity: with those hurt and killed, with their families and loved ones, and with all Muslims and migrants in these islands. This terrorist violence – a race massacre – aimed to divide us. We unite with those hurting.

The barbarity of this act defies belief, but it has a political logic. This was an act of calculated terrorism, drawing on fascism and Islamophobia. There is no great mystery here, and Muslims leaders have been speaking out for years about the normalisation and mainstreaming of Islamophobic hate. Every politician, every columnist and talkshow host, every intellectual and media celebrity who has played a role in normalising anti-Muslim bigotry bears some responsibility for this tragedy.

Trump's "Muslim ban" and the War on Terror globally have set the scene, but local figures have contributed their part. Stuff and New Zealand Herald columnists lined up last year to defend the "rights" of fascists Stefan Molyneux and Lauren Southern. [1] Jordan Peterson, who has called Islamophobia a "propagandistic" word, received widespread coverage earlier this year. [2] At one event, Peterson was seen smiling alongside a fan wearing a "Proud Islamophobe" t-shirt. Simon Bridges, Judith Collins and the National Party have flirted with alt-right and far right rhetoric around the UN. It is socially and politically acceptable in mainstream circles to talk about Islam and Muslims as a problem or an issue to be dealt with.

Hundreds rallied in Auckland last year against "Sharia law", and ACT's Stephen Berry was there to support them. Fascist groups in Christchurch disrupted election meetings in 2011, and Muslims, Jews and other visible minorities have reported graffiti, harassment and abuse at their gathering places across the country for years. All this while most commentators would have us believe that "identity politics" and the decline of free speech are the issues of the day. This is the context that grew fascist violence.

Many of those murdered were refugees and migrants. There is an added cruelty that those who came here fleeing persecution in their old homes should face it in their new, and that too has a political logic. The truth is that every political party in the current parliament has, in some form over the last decade, toyed with and promoted anti-immigrant rhetoric. Winston Peters talked about the "real impact immigration is having on the Kiwi way of life" in 2017. [3] National opposed doubling the refugee quota. Murderous fascism may be extreme, but it cannot exist without the wider anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant political culture promoted by the mainstream.

This is not a mysterious event. It must be understood as an expression of Islamophobia and white supremacist ideology, and countered accordingly.

Racism permeates New Zealand society, nowhere more so than in policing. The Muslim community have known the threats they face for years, and yet nothing was done. Anjum Rahman of the Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand has written about how her organisation pleaded and begged with authorities for anti-Muslim threats to be taken seriously. [4]

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Millions of dollars have been wasted on persecuting Māori activists on trumped-up 'terror' charges, and on surveilling mosques such as Linwood's. Peace activists were prosecuted and harassed for protesting weapons conferences in Wellington, with more money still wasted on bogus prosecutions. And yet killers were able to organise undetected. Serious questions need to be asked about the priorities, politics and prejudice of the police.

And what has the response of the police been since the tragedy? To discourage Muslims and visible minorities from gathering in public and to try and keep people away from vigils and protests. They are utterly without moral authority.

There is a different path. That is the path of solidarity. Every gathering, every vigil, every protest that stands with Muslims shows the power we can have as a collective. Terrorism tries to isolate and divide us. Mass mobilisations, trusting ourselves as workers, show that we will not let Muslims be isolated and we will not be divided. That can give comfort, and courage, to the oppressed, and it can challenge other workers to show further solidarity.

We need to build solidarity rallies in the coming weeks to hammer this message home: Muslims are welcome, racism is not; down with Islamophobia and white supremacist hatred!

We are united in grief, but this is a political grief. It responds to a fascist hatred. Fascism loathes our freedoms – the religious and civil freedoms of Muslims, the rights of our diversity, workers' power as collectives – and we must show our rejection of the hatred motivating this race massacre by exercising those freedoms collectively.

Mourning and respect, in this context, mean staying on the streets. Union events must go ahead. Rallies, strikes and stop-work meetings are the engines of class unity and power, the very things the far right hate. They give us a chance to be together in working-class unity, Muslim and non-Muslim, visibly united and fighting. We argue against any calls to postpone or cancel trade union activity.

Fascism is the politics of despair. It hopes to bring despair in others, through bestial acts of cruelty like those in Christchurch. It feeds racism, bigotry, fear and loathing of the other. It grows in hopelessness. Socialism is the politics of hope, of working-class unity, of cooperation from below against white supremacy and the divisions promoted from above. The mass rallies across the country since this atrocity show a way forward: solidarity, hope, defiance. Confronting fascism, and driving anti-Muslim and anti-migrant bigotry out of society, is an urgent task for us all today.

First we mourn, now we organise.

17 March 2019

[International Socialist Organisation National Committee in Aotearoa/New Zealand](#)

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[1] <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/362284/alt-right-speakers-stefan-molyneux-and-lauren-southern-anger-nz-muslims>.

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[2] <https://twitter.com/jordanbpeterson/status/841252217860562951?lang=en>.

[3] Winston Peters is the leader of New Zealand First and has been Deputy Prime Minister since as his party is in coalition with the Labour Party.

[4] <https://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/on-air/larry-williams-drive/audio/anjum-rahman-muslim-community-have-long-feared-an-attack/>.