

# Australian political, media establishment buries alleged far-right plan to behead Labor MP

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The official media and the major parties have made very little of a disturbing right-wing terrorist incident last week in Newcastle, a regional centre several hours north of Sydney.

The muted response has occurred under conditions where the very same outlets and parties are hysterically slandering peaceful pro-Palestinian activism as a potential source of “politically-motivated violence.”

On Wednesday afternoon, 19-year-old Jordan Patten walked into the electorate office of Newcastle state Labor MP Tim Crackanthorp. Patten was wearing a combat-style outfit and tactical equipment and had knives in his possession. He was also live streaming his activities to the Internet. Having walked into the office and paused after encountering Crackanthorp’s staff, Patten walked out and was later apprehended by police.

The next day, Patten was charged with one count of preparing or planning a terrorist act. The charge sheet alleges he had intended to behead Crackanthorp.

There are questions about whether others may also have been targets. Wednesday was the first time New South Wales (NSW) Labor leader Chris Minns visited Newcastle since becoming premier of the state in March 2023. It would seem a substantial coincidence that Patten chose to target Crackanthorp the very day he was in the company of Minns, who as premier of the country’s largest state is a prominent national figure.

On Friday morning, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese briefly referenced the incident during a press conference. He described himself as having been threatened with violence in a manifesto that Patten had prepared, and appeared to become emotional.

Patten had sent the manifesto to politicians and media outlets some time before travelling to Crackanthorp’s

office.

The manifesto is reportedly a rambling 205 pages. It features a grab bag of issues, including claims of government hypocrisy and criminality. The document is said to contain a number of standard right-wing talking points, including hostility to women and to homosexuals, agitation over purported promiscuity and claims that criminal incidents involving immigrants have been downplayed in Europe and elsewhere.

Patten reportedly describes himself as a supporter of the Liberal Party, denounces “the left” and discusses his plans to kill leading members of the Labor Party as well as their staff.

Most significantly, the manifesto favorably references Brenton Tarrant, the Australian-born terrorist who in March 2019 murdered 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Patten describes himself as having become fascinated by Tarrant’s actions.

There would appear to be copycat elements. The distribution of a manifesto and the live streaming of the incident by Patten mirrored Tarrant’s attack. The cover of Patten’s manifesto is partially drawn from that which was distributed by Tarrant.

An X/Twitter account identified as belonging to Patten had as its profile picture a cartoon portrait of Tarrant which is widely used in fascist and Nazi circles where Tarrant is viewed as a hero. Patten’s X feed was reportedly more explicit than parts of the manifesto, featuring a stream of reposted content involving common extreme-right themes of intense antisemitism and hostility to “the left.”

A number of issues remain unclear. It is not known, for instance, why Patten apparently aborted whatever he had been planning. Nor has there been any

explanation of how he was able to walk into a political office unhindered, despite having been quite public and wearing a bizarre, combat-style outfit. The police only arrived after Patten had entered and then left Crackanthorp's office of his own accord.

On Thursday, the magistrate who heard the charge against Patten referenced "overtones of mental health" issues. Patten was unemployed and not studying and came from an area with relatively high rates of social distress. The interaction between psychological problems, social deprivation and political motives remains to be determined. It may be that Patten is acquitted on mental health or other grounds.

There is no indication, however, that the limited interest of the media is motivated by sensitivity around such questions. Instead, it forms part of a pattern where the threat posed by far-right political violence has been systematically downplayed.

Tarrant himself is virtually never mentioned in the press or by political leaders. That is despite the fact that Tarrant was radicalised while in Australia, is one of the country's most prolific terrorists and is revered in its Nazi and fascist milieu.

In the case of Tarrant, the blackout on his case, which extends to New Zealand, serves to cover over unexplained issues, including the extent to which he was involved with other far-right forces and why the intelligence agencies did not stop his attack.

More generally though, the role of the political establishment in cultivating an extreme and fascist milieu is covered over. In Australia, fascist tendencies, including the explicitly Nazi National Socialist Network, whose leader attempted to recruit Tarrant in the years before his attack, emerged in conjunction with official right-wing campaigns.

For years, they fed off the demonisation of Muslims and immigrants by the official parties, including Labor, presenting themselves as "Australian patriots." The far-right was promoted by the official media in racist campaigns against a purported crisis surrounding "African gangs." During the first years of the pandemic, its members were very active in an anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine movement. Those right-wing mobilisations were used as justification for the corporate-driven lifting of all safety measures by governments, including Labor.

The development of far-right and fascist tendencies

is not unique to Australia. They have been promoted internationally, including with the presidency of Donald Trump in the US and the elevation of fascist forces across Europe. That is part of a broader turn by the ruling elites towards authoritarianism directed against growing social opposition from the working class.

The growing prominence of far-right forces poses the central threat of politically-motivated violence. Whatever the exact circumstances and secondary factors, that is again underscored by the incident in Newcastle. There have been a number of other incidents where far-right and fascist forces have been accused of planning or preparing terroristic attacks. ASIO, the domestic intelligence agency, has been compelled to note a growing threat of far-right terrorism.

The major parties, however, and the media deliberately ignore this reality as they slander popular opposition, especially to the Gaza genocide.

Patten's aborted attack at a Labor electorate office came as senior Labor politicians, including Albanese, had for weeks been railing against pro-Palestinian activities. This has centrally included claims that peaceful protests at Labor electorate offices, opposing the government's complicity in the genocide, are unacceptable and an attack on democracy. Pro-Palestinian graffiti has been depicted as "violence." Commentators have issued a stream of articles denouncing such actions, but have remained silent on what occurred in Newcastle.



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