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The Wellington Protest, 2022:
Signs of Franchised Fascism in New Zealand

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines various signs displayed over the course of the February/March 2022 anti-lockdown protest, which convoyed from around the country to Wellington and occupied Parliament grounds for three weeks, resulting in significant disruption to the city, damage to Parliament grounds, and injuries to Police officers. I collected and collated images of these signs before analysing the signs' language in order to better understand the form of socio-political movement this protest constitutes. I argue the signs of the Wellington Protest convey strong evidence of fascist language and sentiments, show transnational connections with other anti-government protest movements in the model of a globally connected franchise, and constitute the early stages of a fascist political movement that has potential to flourish in New Zealand given the current strength of populist sentiment. However, the current evidence indicates that scholars and security professionals appear to have fundamentally misunderstood the concept and practices of fascism, and continue to underestimate the political forces revealed by the protest. Security scholars and professionals have an obligation to keep New Zealand informed of, and safe from the progenitors of political violence. By not understanding the anti-lockdown protest as part of a transnationally connected, franchise-able fascist movement, these scholars and practitioners forego important insight into the activities of relevant groups who, after the protest, establish political parties, propaganda radio, and community fundraising networks.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Wellington Protest comprised the 'Freedom Convoy' which began on 6 February 2022 and ended up with protestors, who were ostensibly anti-vaccine mandates and vaccine passes, occupying Parliament grounds. After weeks of significant disruption to the central city (O'Brien & Huntington, 2022) and wall-to-wall media coverage, the police operation to clear the grounds on 2 March involved hundreds of officers and led to 82 officers being treated by ambulance paramedics (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2023). Despite the derisive tone from social media and news channels over the course of the convoy, the movement was organised enough to set up a logistical base and encamp on Parliament grounds for nearly a month.

I paid close attention to the protest after a chance encounter with the convoy as they made their way from Taupo to Napier, which was a powerful experience due to the huge numbers involved. It took me close to an hour to drive past them as they came in the opposite direction. Two things stood out for me: the signs and the enthusiasm with which they were displayed by the convoy. The signs were passionately political, often much removed from the mainstream, and waved with much enthusiasm by participants of all ages, including small children. There seemed to be a disconnect between the protestors' stated political aims when they were encamped on Parliament grounds, and the stories in the media that covered the protest in derisive terms. This included news stories of sitting Members of Parliament refusing to come out and meet with the protestors as well as the then-Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declaring the occupation of Parliament grounds was not a legitimate protest. By the close of the occupation's final day, the Police successfully cleared the grounds after earlier attempts had failed, though they faced significant resistance from protestors, including violent clashes, thrown projectiles, and injuries to numerous officers. The final day gripped

the nation's attention, with dedicated news bulletins and repeated condemnation of the protest.

The convoy and the occupation presented a significant security issue for New Zealand in general and Wellington in particular. Despite the derisiveness of the 'anti-vax' label that was frequently applied to the Wellington Protest, what I saw during my encounter with the convoy better reflected the politics of the final day than did vaccine mandates specifically: the messages contained in of Figure 1: *FREEDOM FIGHTER* and Figure 2: *NZ ANTHEM HEAR OUR VOICES* made me consider that the political movement at play may be larger than the vaccine issue. The effects on the Wellington CBD, where protestors clashed with workers on their way to work wearing masks, violent language toward Ardern, and the fact the occupation portion of the protest was breaking social distancing rules continuously led me to consider studying the Wellington Protest through the protestors' own words and signs.

Literature Review

The New Zealand academic literature on the Wellington Protest is not well-established. Most of the most relevant pieces were published in 2022, not long after the protest had finished. Sapkota (2022) describes the media who were filming throughout the protest, focusing on the Māori perspective of being shamed by fellow iwi at the protest, and describing it as copping abuse and having their morality and Māoridom questioned. An intriguing anecdote came from TVNZ journalist Sam Von Keisenberg, who went undercover into the throng of the protest. He described moderates out outnumbering extremists, yet also recounts an incident where an immune compromised elderly man, who was wearing a mask, had fellow protestors trying to rip it off of him until Von Keisenberg himself intervened. This mob mentality gives us a clue to some of the powerful social forces present at the Wellington Protest, which could lead the 'moderates' of the group to become emboldened or radicalised by the more extreme politics of some of those present. Additionally, the piece offered insight

into the protest's disdain for traditional media, something that transcended even bonds between shared Iwi, with many of the media present being attacked by thrown objects and accused of being paedophiles. I believe both of these offered useful areas of insight as to how the Wellington Protest seemed to be already in its own information bubble.

O'Brien and Huntington (2022) became one of the most useful pieces on the Wellington Protest because it tackled the movement as the potential emergence of an alt-right strand of politics that had international parallels. Additionally, it provided useful insight into the temporal nature of the occupation phase in Wellington: from the observer's (nearby citizens and media) perspective, they went from seeing the occupation as a nuisance that would quickly run out of steam, to worrying about the potential impacts and defacement of Parliament grounds and threats to their safety. From their observations *of* the protestors, they saw a change from the anti-vaccination stance into anti-government, conspiratorial language that threatened public officials. O'Brien & Huntington also focused on the decentralised nature of the protest and infighting, saying that it lacked a Trumpian or Bolsonaro type-figure. This observation led me to investigate the leadership question more deeply given my own data showed the significant presence of Trump on the signs and flags present, and his role as the common anti-establishment figure of worship in all the foreign anti-government fascist movements following Covid.

The last useful piece of New Zealand academic literature on the Wellington Protest came from Clark (2022), a noted anti-far-right researcher who has published a book on the role of the far-right in New Zealand. His piece included an outline of the *before* of the Wellington Protest, providing a valuable counterpoint to O'Brien and Huntington (2022) by showing that, even in the *preceding* weeks before the convoy began, online chat and Counterspin Media was already calling for the citizen's arrest of public officials, including then-Minister for Health Andrew Little, for which three people were arrested and charged for

attempting to enter Parliament unlawfully. Clark also offers thorough analysis of Counterspin media's international financial links to Trump-allied political figures, such as Steve Bannon and host Kelvyn Alp, former founder of an armed militia – the New Zealand Armed Intervention Force – which aimed to overthrow the New Zealand government. This, and many other connections outlined in detail throughout the piece, led Clark to conclude that New Zealand media should not be waiting for events like the Wellington Protest to happen again before trying and gaining insight into the far-right movements here. Instead, Clark posits that new technologies, such as Telegram (which emerged as a heavy presence in my research), are where the *true* views of these groups lie.

Overall, the above-mentioned relevant and specific research contained many useful insights and investigative leads for me to pursue in my research. However, there was a cognitive disconnect in O'Brien and Huntington (2022) and Sapkota (2022) that highlighted some of the *it-can't-happen-here* character of the Kiwi psyche. Sapkota (2022) highlighted the genuine fear for their safety of the media present, yet at least one member described the protest as mostly moderate due to the de-escalation of an assault on an elderly man over mask use, even when it was the journalist himself who deescalated the event. O'Brien and Huntington (2022) wrote about the overwhelming preponderance of the signs and scrawling in chalk, the violence of the messages, and how similar it seemed to international movements of the same ilk, yet declared it lacked a Trump-like figure, despite enormous Trump flags and MAGA merch being significant presences in the signs. Clark (2022) was the most in-depth of all the pieces and showed the extent to which the protest was led internationally and through social media, but I believe he missed some of the broader social forces that the previous two pieces managed to highlight. My hopes leading into my research project was that the extra time since the protest, and scale of my project, would allow me to link together the useful threads that the previous relevant literature had established, and knit them together, using the

words of the Wellington protesters in a way that showed the social forces, communication, *and* outcomes as a cohesive and coherent whole. To do this, much of the relevant research on similar movements overseas became a key part of my own search for an explanation. I believe that the transnational linkages established by the initial pieces here in New Zealand justified me incorporating contemporary research emerging elsewhere, which pointed to a new wave of fascism.

Security Studies Methodology

My approach here stems from a collection of Critical Security Studies methodologies, involving approaching security issues not as objects to be studied from afar, but people-centred, deeply political, and socially embedded practices (Aradau et al., 2014). In this vein, whilst the analyses are separated into chapters and sub-sections, most of what I analysed is heavily context-dependant and, therefore, cannot be fully divorced from other aspects if I am to achieve a deeper and more comprehensive understanding. The protestors' cries of victimhood cannot be divorced from the fascist manner of spouting their fractured messaging of untruth. Claimed government and police oppression can only be understood by zooming out to the protest taking place for weeks on Parliament grounds, which is the very seat of democracy in New Zealand. Calls for violence to remove a 'violent' government can only be analysed fully through understanding fascist double-speak. Thus, many sections of the ensuing chapters refer to other sections and chapters of the thesis, as analysing the intersections between the essentialist strategies and aspects of what does and does not define fascist movements is where the greatest insight lies.

Wondering as Epistemology

This research project is built on the epistemology of wondering as a methodology of inquiry (Salter et al. 2023). This frame of wondering began with my own chance encounter with the convoy, when my now wife and I got stuck travelling past the northern convoy on

State Highway 5 as they travelled from Taupo through to Napier. For about forty-five minutes we slowly crawled past a never-ending parade of campervans, trucks, cars, all emblazoned with slogans, tooting madly, all being met by groups on the side of the road and on roundabouts waving signs and flags and cheering them on. It was a surreal experience and an outpouring of emotion and passion that the subsequent media portrayal of the convoy and occupation did not adequately capture. I felt a sense of unease at the dominant anti-vax messaging of the media, as it seemed to me it did not capture much of what the Wellington Protest was trying to say, something that was the progenitor of my idea to capture as many of the images as possible to first understand their own words before I attempted to understand and, hopefully, explain their behaviours.

Data Collection

The quality of my research project depended on the breadth and origins of my source material. My initial prototype data collection during the project design phase involved searching media stories for images that contained signs, providing enough material that my project was deemed feasible. My search for data to commence the main project first involved reaching out to all major news outlets that had posted stories and images from the Wellington Protest. None initially replied. I submitted an official information act request for images of the protest from the New Zealand Police, who had a large collection of images. After the request was denied, I entered negotiations with the Police to work toward a solution, deciding ultimately to discontinue after I felt a workable solution would not be achievable without compromising my academic freedom.

Searching for a large source of material, I ended up using publicly available images posted on Twitter. After application programming interface (API) changes made data scraping twitter not possible in 2023, I used the (now defunct) Twitter searching site nitter.net, which allowed me not only to search via hashtags, but also filter via images only, dates, and

location. I limited my search to images only, posted with the ‘#convoy2022NZ’ and ‘#wellingtonprotest’ hashtags and manually scrolled every image posted under this hashtag for each day of the protest. I saved every photo that had a discernible sign in it, wanting no filtering of any images at this early collection stage. This process took a long period of time but ended up being my most fruitful primary data source.

During this process, a contact at Stuff.co.nz got in touch with me, and sent me unpublished images from a video-journalist present at the protest. These were some of the best images I had due to their quality, allowing me to extract bumper stickers and hand-written notes on signs in detail.

I sorted all my primary data by date where possible, as I wanted to conduct some form of temporal analysis. After my data collection was completed, I had the three sources: Twitter; Stuff; and Google media images. I then created an excel spreadsheet for each data source, extracting individual signs from my collected images and placing them into cells and captioning them to allow for key term searching. I placed the Twitter scrapes and the Stuff images in a timeline because these had metadata, and I placed the Google media photos into ‘convoy’ and ‘occupation’ phases as that was the only certain delineation I could establish. By the end of this process, I had 448 signs as my data ready for analysis.

Analysing Language in Their Own Words

I wanted to undertake an inductive sorting process, based on a qualitative approach. I believe that a quantitative language model approach would miss the nuance of the *imagery* that I had collected, as images contain more than just words, especially when it comes to political communication (Kenski & Jamieson, 2017). The image sorting process itself had made me intimately familiar with the signs, and after repeatedly going through the signs individually, as well as the original shots that showed them in group context, I ended up with

six thematic categories: Personal freedom; appeal to emotion; group solidarity; provocative; anti-politics; and conspiracy.

The theme of Personal freedom dominated the early days of the protest, forming the most common message overall. It largely took the form of the word '*freedom*' incorporated in various ways and slogans, as well as freedom of choice and body-centric messaging that was co-opted from the woman's abortion rights movements. Messages along these lines tended to be the outward face of the protest, whether on the front lines or prominent on large signs. In the convoy, those who lined up in support on bridges and on roadsides held signs that were dominated by this theme of messaging.

The theme of Appeal to emotion most commonly took the form of outward messages to the general public, especially the references to children. Signs imploring the viewer to 'wake up' or accusing the government of lying were typical of the emotional appeal style of sign which tries to invoke an action in those reading it. There were also appeals to empathy using personal anecdotes, which aimed to humanise the protest in the eyes of those watching. These forms of messaging tended to fall into traditional political messaging, attempting to create an emotional response or further thought on the issue. Some of these appeals to emotion blur the line with conspiracy and are good candidates to analyse through the concept of fascistic double-speak, where those in the know, or with some insider vocabulary, will understand the deeper message on display.

Another theme, Group solidarity, rose to prominence subsequently as the protest embedded itself on Parliament grounds. Messages aimed at the unity and power of the protestors were a significant theme of the protest's latter stages. Although they were mostly internal forms of communication, they were not used so exclusively as other signs, such as those appealing to unity or espousing the group's moral high-ground, also became common. This category of signs tended to fall into the realms of uniting the group for a common

purpose, such as the small amount of internal messaging on signs urging the protestors to act as one, or uniting the group as opposed to an external individual or group, such as the anti-Trevor Mallard/Jacinda Ardern subsection of signs.

The theme of Provocative was a smaller but consistent group of messages, mostly centring around messages on lack of democracy, vaccine fear, and side effects. Children were used in many of these messages, either holding the signs, or commonly referenced in the signs. Although the use of children is a common tactic to elicit an emotional response, I coded these as provocative due to the more intense language that this group of signs displayed. The provocative/fear-inducing signs were often conspiracy adjacent too, especially if handwritten. Many of the bumper stickers that were on cars and on signs were of a provocative nature, possibly due to a correlation between having to be punchy because of their small size. These provocative bumper stickers used and co-opted familiar imagery alongside their short messages, such as warning signs and hazard symbols as a shorthand for danger. There was a particular US-centric slant to many of these bumper stickers, illustrated by an example I discuss later in this thesis, where white bumper car stickers were locally produced and much more uplifting in message whereas yellow bumper car stickers were clearly US based, featuring imagery of Dr Anthony Fauci, who led the US covid response.

Anti-politics is a broad category that covers attacks on political figures and the Fourth Estate. Referring to mainstream media as a virus was another common ploy, showing an attempt to position the media as the enemy and to sow distrust as to how the protest was presented on television. Public figures, such as Dr Ashley Bloomfield and speaker of the house Trevor Mallard, were attacked in certain signs and bumper stickers, but by far the most significant target was Jacinda Ardern. The vast majority of Ardern messaging was negative in nature, with only one exception (neutral in tone) in my sample. Many of the signs attacked her appearance, were sexist, and called for violence against her specifically, or her and other

political figures. Fascist double-speak was most prominent here, where much of the messaging is compartmentalised into either target, action, or method, but no specific sign tells the full story, something that can only be understood when viewing the language of the signs as a collective whole.

The smallest, but still significant, theme comprised of broader *conspiracy* messages. 5G, new world order, Epstein, and antisemitic conspiracies were a smaller but consistent refrain throughout the protest. There was a correlation in form, where most of these messages were hand-written, although there were several seemingly imported conspiracy narratives, such as Q-anon, and bumper stickers that had both USA referencing language as well as Dr Fauci in place of Ardern or Bloomfield as their target of choice.

Theoretical Framework

Having selected an inductive method of categorising my primary data, the data analysis phase led me to better comprehend that, collectively, the protest represented some form of socio-political movement. Seeking to gain understanding and reconcile the broad range of categories of my data analysis, I started reading scholarly works on various methods of political change and sociopolitical movements, searching for them using the key words of the categories I had used to sort my images of the various signs. *The Five Stages of Fascism* (Paxton, 1998) became a foundational work for this thesis and reading it constituted a hinge moment for my understanding of this problem. That work offered a useful theoretical framework to explain my analysis as it contained descriptions not only of many of the messages in the signs, but also the collective *mis-en-scene* of emotionality that comprised the images of which the signs were extracted from. Paxton (1998) ended up containing many phrases, which not only became lenses of analysis for my thesis, but felt like *eureka* moments when I read them.

Mobilising passions stood out immediately as a two-word shorthand that aptly described not only the emotion of the signs, but the kinetic, in-motion manner in which they were often displayed. The passions evidenced on the signs had quite literally mobilised people from around the country to convoy to Wellington, where the energy was maintained (often under difficult conditions) for weeks. Delving deeper into the phrasing also led to a curiosity about what the mobilised movement did *not* contain: facts! The specific phrase from Paxton, namely that fascism is built on emotion rather than cool, logical thought (Paxton, 1998), tracked closely with my primary data analysis, which enabled understanding not only of what the protest was *telling us* was mobilising them, but also opened the door to application of further works by contemporary scholars who have examined how fascist communication works in a digital age, and the mechanisms of mis and disinformation in conspiracy groups and the far-right more broadly.

Paxton's description of *stages* helped to clear my earlier preconceptions, having conflated fascist movements only with those who committed atrocities in WWII. Understanding that fascist movements are common, ever adapting, but nearly all unsuccessful in creating authoritarian fascist rule, removes the taboo surrounding the word *fascism* and allows useful theoretical frameworks established by scholars in the field of fascism to be applied. Breaking this taboo by understanding the common banality of fascism was a significant leap in my understanding of the social forces animating the Wellington Protest, and has allowed what I believe to be a deeper and more full understanding of the movement than would have been possible if less inflammatory, but also *less accurate* concepts such as populism, conspiracy, and alt-right were used as my frames of analysis.

Using Paxton as my foundational theoretical work, I found a wealth of overseas research that was already examining very similar contemporary movements around Europe, using the lens of fascism as applied transnationally (Alcalde, 2020; el-Ojeili, 2019; Fielitz &

Marcks, 2019; Tilles, 2006; Wilkie, 2023). Additionally, there has been a renewed interest in how these anti-vaccine/anti-lockdown/anti-mandate protests were organising on social media, with many papers published since mid-2020 finding the same patterns of protest emerging from conspiracy-adjacent telegram networks (Bratich, 2022; Callison & Slobodian, 2021; Curley et al., 2022; Fominaya, 2024; Gillies et al., 2023; Lange & Monscheuer, 2022; Pietrucci, 2023; Pleyers, 2020; Russell, 2023; Schulze et al., 2022; Vieten, 2020; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023). One of the most important theoretical bases of knowledge I drew from was up-to-date analysis of how these conspiracy groups were being co-opted and radicalised toward the far-right, something that gave me a mechanism of action to square the circle of how a broad coalition of anti-mandate protesters can coalesce and become an early-stage fascist movement (Callison & Slobodian, 2021; Chen et al., 2023; Curley et al., 2022; DeVerna et al., 2024; Giroux, 2022, 2023; Martel et al., 2024; Pietrucci, 2023; Richards, 2022; Rousis et al., 2022; Tebaldi, 2021; Weigand et al., 2022; White, 2024).

In summation, there is a broad and cutting-edge contemporary body of overseas research explaining how the types of movements comprising the Wellington Protest communicated and organised, and I felt justified heading into the analysis phase with the understanding that both foundational and current research had explanatory value when analysing my images. Foundationally, Paxton (1998) offered a theoretical explanation of why the group's adopted certain behaviours and objectives, and the body of current research offered an account of *how* these groups operate in a social media environment, which Paxton could not have conceived of in 1998 when he placed firm, nationalistic borders around his explanation of fascisms.

Difficulties and Challenges

Despite my own mental efforts to disentangle fascism as a political movement from its intertwined nature with WWII-era fascist regimes in my own mind, the use of the term and

its foundational literature as my tool of analysis has led to one of my largest difficulties working on this project, which has taken various forms of scepticism, fear, and denial over the use of the word *fascism* to describe the Wellington Protest. After my initial *eureka* moment, a preliminary presentation to my academic peers went rather poorly as there was strong pushback over my use of the term fascism to describe both the Wellington Protest and former US President Donald Trump. I had anticipated that using the term may make people uncomfortable with regards to the Wellington Protest, however I was genuinely surprised at the pushback over Trump given that preeminent scholars, including Paxton, had by this time labelled him a fascist following the 6 January insurrection (Paxton, 2021) and congressional hearings had established the activities of 6 January were a coordinated takeover attempt with a plan to subvert election results (Holtzman, 2022). Regardless, I received significant criticism for my position and was awarded low marks for presentation. (However, I remain grateful to one classmate who later encouraged me to pursue this line of enquiry and gave me the courage to pursue this topic.)

Learning from this, I presented my thesis topic in vague terms when describing it further, particularly when it came to approaching groups for potential data collection. The New Zealand Police rejected my OIA request for images taken at the protest, describing the request as too broad/difficult, even after I offered to do the data sorting of their 6600 images myself in person at their facility. Their response indicated that they were worried about their public image in the wake of the final day at Parliament grounds, bringing up the IPCA findings, something I was not concerned about. After attempting to impose a research agreement containing what was effectively a veto on my thesis if they agreed to let me use their data, I decided that their conditions were onerous and would not allow me the academic integrity that is essential to effective research. This was the biggest period of risk for my thesis, as without data I could not continue. The combination of my initial media search,

nitter.net's ability to scrape Twitter effectively by date and tagline, and the generosity of the Stuff editor and videographer fortunately allowed me enough data to continue the project.

Central Argument

This thesis critically examines various signs displayed over the course of the February/March 2022 anti-lockdown protest in order to better understand the form of socio-political movement the protest constitutes. I argue the signs of the Wellington Protest convey strong evidence of fascist language and sentiments, show transnational connections with other anti-government protest movements in the model of a globally connected franchise, and constitute the early stages of a fascist political movement that has potential to flourish in New Zealand given the current strength of populist sentiments. The unique significance of my findings lie in the link between the online experience and the physical world. By tracing the very specific phrasings of the signs across time and space I was able to establish a pattern of communication across continents, where telegram channels allowed the instantaneous dissemination of the intended message to groups around the world, where they would reemerge, translated if needed, as various chants, slogans, and messages held by far-right allied, conspiratorial groups across the globe. In this way, modern fascism functions as a global franchise: the message is broadly the same, the product is consistent and reliable, with updates able to be organised as fast as they can be thought. Yet, like a franchise, each protest brings a local flavour. In New Zealand, we had the use of slogans from Europe presented in Te Reo, attacks against United States officials subbed out for our own prominent figures, and the 'convoy' of Ottawa replaced with the 'hikoi' of Wellington. The Wellington Protest *felt* intrinsically Kiwi, but it had much more in common with a limited-time burger at a fast-food chain than something that was truly homegrown.

Unfortunately, New Zealand scholars and security professionals appear to have fundamentally misunderstood the concept and practices of fascism, and continue to

underestimate the political forces revealed by the protest. I hope my research enables New Zealand security scholars to gain a greater understanding of the transnational links that undergirded the Wellington Protest. I also hope that this research allows overseas security scholars working on their own franchised fascist movements to understand that the language they are using can be tied not only to their own work, but back to foundational scholars in order to revise the definitions of fascism for the smartphone enabled, social media world in which we live in. We should not expect contemporary fascism to look like, or organise how it did, a hundred years ago. Yet we should expect it to have the same political objectives. In this unstable global environment we are currently living in, with rising inequality, political polarisation, a global pandemic, and the social media algorithms leeching off the engagement that these provide, fascist movements are feeding off the instability and forming movements that intend to subvert whichever minority outgroup it can in order to gain power – something that fascism does not relinquish easily.

It Could Happen Here

Since I began this project, I have experienced significantly more open-mindedness around the possibilities of the resurgence of fascisms around the globe. In the United States, Donald Trump has been using language of blood and soil in his campaign speeches, comparing his political enemies to vermin and asking for their extermination, and is now requiring unflinching loyalty from his political supporters. He is emboldened by a Supreme Court that now grants him retroactive immunity for any crimes he committed whilst President, and also any future crimes he may commit (Roisman, 2024). The Republican Party backs a policy plan set by the ultra-conservative Heritage Foundation, which would embed Christian Nationalism into the education curriculum, further control women and their bodies, and create the permissive space to crack down on any forms of minorities that the President wishes (Quinn & Rosen, 2024).

In Europe, Italy is now led by an open fan of Mussolini, the European Parliament elections swung far to the right, with Alternative für Deutschland receiving 15.9 % of the vote. France stemmed the tide by calling a snap election in the wake of these results, but it is worrying that Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement national received 31.4% of the national vote for its far-right platform running for EU Parliament (European Parliament, 2024). The proportion of far-right vote share across Europe is rising, as the continent deals with the post-covid inflationary crisis and mass immigration over the previous decade (Cunningham et al., 2024).

Whilst New Zealand has so far been spared a resurgent far-right movement, there has been an increasing comfort in certain groups expressing violence towards queer people in particular, with the Posie Parker visit in 2023 being followed by defacement of Rainbow crossings, and groups such as Destiny Church – who were a strong presence at the Wellington Protest – publicly encouraging their members to go after members of the LGBTQI+ community. I urge greater attention placed on the potential escalation of these vandalisms as a public security concern by both politicians and security practitioners alike, especially given incidences of anti-queer mass-shootings overseas (Valcore & Buckler, 2023). With New Zealand having the lead-in time of generally following global fascistic trends and anti-minority movements, there should be significant attention paid to the trends that we should expect to see reach our shores, given the current trend of a franchise of these overseas violent fascistic outcomes being established in New Zealand.

Political Class, Academic Divide

It is my hope that the research and findings of my thesis are of both help and importance to security practitioners, academics, or anyone that may find them of use to acquire understanding of what a fascist movement looks like in the social media age. In part, my motivation to undertake this project was that politicians and academics have remained quiet

on this issue, largely due to what I posit as their own lack of feeling for the risk factors for fascism, such as inequality and lack of government trust, but also because most groups of people misunderstand what contemporary fascism should and *does* look like. It is deeply online in its communication, with the stereotypes used to identify it – that of hyperbolic, catastrophising rhetoric, demonisation of outgroups, and the jackbooted zeal of a group absolutely fervent in its belief – taking place in the compartmentalised online sphere until *suddenly it is not*. The pushback I received from certain members of my own academic cohort, even on the point that Trump specifically is a fascist (Paxton, 2021), only furthered my belief that the term fascism had been too closely conflated with the worst atrocities in the 1940's, rather than the origins and consolidations of the movement in the 1920's and 1930's (Bauerkämper & Rossoliński, 2017). The added complication of compartmentalisation of fascist narratives to enormous but disconnected social media groups only exacerbates this issue. My hope is that this thesis helps break through the equally compartmentalised existence of the political decision makers and leading security scholars who do not feel the populist groundswell that the majority of New Zealand does due to their insulation from economic pressures, and do not see nor understand the online existence of such large Telegram groups (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023) because they are (hopefully) not part of them, or are unaware of the outsized importance of their existence.

By revealing these transnational linkages through the language of the Wellington Protest, in their own words, using their own signs, I hope to bring the movement back into focus for researchers, security scholars, and help organisations, such as He Whenua Taurikura (HWT), give accurate, reliable, and up-to-date academic analysis to the Government. I hope this work can empower those tasked with keeping those in New Zealand safe to not look back at the Wellington Protest and think 'thank goodness it was not worse' and instead say 'thank goodness they gave us a warning'.

Chapter Two: Fascist Language of the Wellington Protest

On 2 March 2022, an overwhelming police force swept through Parliament grounds, clearing what had become an encampment of anti-vaccine mandate/anti-government protestors that had convoyed to Wellington from both ends of Aotearoa, causing significant disruption for weeks. By the end of the day, eighty two officers were treated in hospital as fights and fires broke out. Despite the wall-to-wall media coverage and high levels of public awareness of the events in Wellington, the tone towards the protestors themselves was dismissive both during and after, with labels such as anti-vax and conspiracy theorists being common refrain to describe them. This chapter argues that those labels are inadequate to capture this complex political phenomenon. Instead, the Wellington Protest is best understood as the latest of a series of interconnected, coordinated transnational fascist movements that have gained traction globally in the post-covid political landscape. By analysing the protest's signs, I will explain how their own language fits within foundational and modern scholarly understandings of fascism, how this language is evidence of the creation of a fascist group, and how their use of mis/disinformation, double speak, and appeal to emotions is consistent with fascist methods of propaganda. I also cover the impacts of these findings, how they should affect understanding of this movement going forward, and why these literal signs may have been missed.

Creation of a Fascist Group

In deciding to analyse the Wellington Protest as a fascist movement, as opposed to other utopian projects such as communism, I was informed and guided by my initial analysis of my primary material. The striking similarities in the descriptions of overseas protests and the one here in Aotearoa suggested these movements may be occurring transnationally. Looking at overseas research, scholarly works examining potential ideologies of the European and North American anti-vaccine/anti-government protests that preceded the

Wellington Protest started emerging as early as 2020: Russell (2022) noted the difficulties of scholars to make sense of the United Kingdom movements in mid-2020 that incorporated anti-vaccine and anti-5G conspiracies, as well as more overtly international political elements such as Q-anon, Trump support, and the British Fascist movement, with similar observations also noted in Australia (Hirst, 2021). Whilst Russell (2022) reaches the conclusion that the far-right tendencies of these protests are coincidental rather than fundamental, others such as Bratich (2022) and Vieten (2020) see the protests as forms of stepping stones towards more cohesive fascist movements, by consolidating anti-government sections of society and pulling them to the far-right politically. Alcade (2020) illustrates how transnational linkages in fascism are fundamental to understanding both what has happened before and what may happen in the future. In particular, they point to the simultaneous emergence of the inter-war fascism's across Europe and elsewhere as evidentiary that some *underlying fundamental condition* was present to allow these movements to take hold. There are many parallels with our contemporary moment: the simultaneous eruption of anti-government, violent protests around the globe was clearly preceded by the societal shockwaves of a global pandemic, in the same way Europe was upheaved by the first Great War and Spanish Influenza. Given this general impression that far-right/fascism could be a valid explanation for the Wellington Protest, and that the prominent themes of libertarian personal freedoms, attacking left-leaning leaders, and advocating less government interference made leftist ideology such as communism unlikely, I persevered forward with my understanding that the Wellington Protest likely stemmed from the same fascist political ideology as other very similar protest movements overseas.

It is prudent to compare systematically both foundational and contemporary scholarly concepts of fascism. Most post-millennium scholars are influenced by Paxton (1998; see also Paxton, 2005), who outlines fascism's emotional components and energies, as well as shows

how they accumulate power in stages. Much of Paxton's (1998) conceptualisation is an incorporation of his definitions of mobilising passions, translated into the ruling style of fascism. For analysis of the Wellington Protest specifically I use a *Paxtonian* functional framing of fascism: that is, an intended system of social order and political authority that attempts to create a pure and energetic united community, standing against the liberal democracy of which the fascist movement accuses of causing decline and intentional division. For the Wellington Protest, being in the first stage of fascism means they did not yet have ruling authority, although they claimed to have it morally, according to Figure 3: *YOU SERVE US*. The signs communicate their ideal/intended social order, as seen in Figure 4: *WE are ALL EQUAL IN RANK. It is THE ONE'S WHO DECIDE. FOR THEN WE ARE NOT*, and Figure 5: *TWO CLASSES OF KIWIS. OK WITH THAT?* Other scholars, such as Eatwell (1996), also point to this sort of language as evidence of the 'social rebirth' that fascist movements provide its participants, in this case moving from a society where those at the Wellington Protest advocate moving from two classes of either vaccinated or unvaccinated Kiwis to one where they are treated equally. The social order they advocate, which is based on freedom, personal liberty, and equal treatment, is indicative of movements such as fascism that are built on the populist everyman sentiment (Lee, 2006). Figure 6: *I'm not a Racist I'm not an activist I AM A KIWI!!* written on the side of a working-truck is an emblem that tracks closely with earlier historical fascisms. Some of the earliest activities of the Nazi Party involved Hitler courting rural folk (Loomis & Beegle, 1946; Grill, 1982), who felt both socially distressed and economically left behind by the Treaty of Versailles and general Economic depression in Europe at the time, something echoed in Figure 7: *TOOT FOR FARMERS!* The Ottawa Truckers Convoy is an even closer analogue to the Wellington Protest and was also built around economically precarious (frequently rural) folks who felt their

livelihoods were being threatened by what they viewed as tyrannical government overreach (Pineiro, 2021).

The feeling of being the victim of societal division and decline formed some of the most consistent messages of the Wellington Protest, as seen in Figure 8: *SIEG HEIL ARDERN OUR MIGHTY FUHRER Man you're good-Setting us against eachother,- Right from the playbook!* Eatwell (1996) enables us to interpret these messages as twofold: firstly, the engagement in demonisation of their enemies and, secondly, the key to their diverse base of support. These are the messages that form the bedrock of popular enthusiasms over time. The feeling of widening inequalities and a popular mood of slipping down the economic rungs of society, whilst simultaneously having the ladder pulled away, is the fuel of fascisms (Woodley, 2009), ultimately manifesting as anti-government energy at whomever is in political power at the time. This is reflected in Figure 9: *THEY ARE WILLING TO TEAR SOCIETY APART TO JAB ALMOST EVERYONE. WILL YOU LET THEM SUCCEED?* These accusations of division and decline create the permissive space and justifications for what fascism truly intends: the removal of democracy and replacement of rule in their image. This is where the protest was initially ahead of local scholarly impressions of public sentiment. Whilst the general public feels a decline in their purchasing power and economic security due to inflation and punished the Labour Government by voting them out in favour of the National Coalition, fascist movements seek means of redress beyond the democratic, as Figure 10: *CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IS A SACRED DUTY WHEN THE STATE BECOMES LAWLESS* attests. With the recent survey results indicating two thirds of kiwis believe that New Zealand is in decline and the economy is rigged towards the rich and powerful, it is perhaps unsurprising that two-thirds of those surveyed distrusted the perceived economic elite and believed that a strong leader was needed to 'take the country back' (Dudding & Hercock, 2024). When accusations of political failure start to be levelled not at the ruling

party, but democracy itself, it allows the Overton window to be shifted over time, more toward advocating not a different option *within* democracy, but instead for a national rebirth toward a less democratic *system*.¹

Role of Emotion

Emotion plays an important role in our understanding of fascistic language. Paxton's seminal piece on the *Five Stages of Fascism* (1998) states that fascist movements start with, and are fuelled by, genuine and popular enthusiasm, rather than by efforts of manipulation by the right or a crisis of capitalism alone. This is not to say, however, that these factors do not or cannot play a role because fascism requires a perceived breakdown of the economy or democracy in order to open up the permissive space for a fascist third way (Eatwell, 1996). The distinction of authentic enthusiasm comes in a feeling. An aspiring leader cannot tell someone the economy is doing poorly (or well!). Their potential support base must *feel* it. How would a leader know they *feel* it? They will *tell* them (Gould, 2010; Dudding & Hercock, 2024).

There is a misunderstanding by media and others as to how this popular energy and emotions manifests in fascisms that is evident in my own primary source material. The photos I sourced from publicly available media outlets are, by and large, dramatic, focused on the anti-vaccination messages, and have a bias towards the final and most violent day of the occupation. This narrow lens expands out to the wider New Zealand public too, in the very language used to describe the occupation: namely, anti-vax, anti-mandate, conspiracy theorists (O'Brien & Huntington, 2022) and more are descriptions that, whilst ostensibly true for at least parts of the protest (Chambers, 2023), do not capture the breadth and scope of messaging and views present during the convoy and occupation. Figure 11: *NO to MANDATES NO to the Vax &...* hints at this complexity.

¹ The Overton window refers to what is acceptable discourse in the public sphere (Beck, 2010).

Instead, scholars of fascism, such as Paxton (1998) and Eatwell (1996), demonstrate identify that a full understanding of fascist movements cannot be gleaned if they are thought to comprise the perfectly rational consumer operating on coolly logical thought. Rather, they must instead be understood as something far more human: emotional, unpredictable, and largely incomprehensible to those outside of the groups themselves (Griffin, 1993). Paxton identifies seven of these emotional fundamentals, which he refers to as the “mobilising passions” of fascist movements (Paxton, 1998. p.6); each of these can be more or less present in varying movements or times than others, and may be explicitly declarative or implicit undertones as part of their messaging.

Many of these passions were evident in the language of my data analysis, though due to the inductive process of category sorting during my research process I originally had them under different names, such as ‘group solidarity’ rather than Paxton’s phrasings of “primacy of the group” and ‘unity’ (Paxton, 1998. p.6). What Paxton describes as passions, Eatwell (1996) describes as the combined ideology where style and enemy degradation trumps meaningful policy changes. This was evident in my analysis where, despite the Wellington Protest ostensibly existing to change specific vaccine mandate/vaccine pass laws, even the earliest stages of the convoy positioned the protest as a movement that would free New Zealand from what they perceived as a tyrannical government, captured in Figure 1:

FREEDOM FIGHTER.

This behaviour and messaging is much more in line with what contemporary research defines fascism as: more conspiratorial, more alienated, and determinedly assured that their position is in the moral right (Chambers, 2023). Of course, these behaviours are not incongruous with earlier fascisms that more foundational scholars have depicted, the increased understanding of exactly which emotions and feelings are central to the driving

forces of fascism could be a result of the increased insight into internal thought that social media use provides.

Foundation of Group Identity

If we view the sign as an attempt to persuade through forming collective communication (Sanders, 2004), there is a seemingly inherent contradiction between asserting group primacy and holding up a sign as an external message to an *outside* observer. I will use here an analogy of a football game to make my point. Having supporters waving banners waxing lyrical as to how great their team is, whilst holding signs about how evil the other team is, seems unlikely to persuade the opposition – or even neutral observers – to their side. In other words, we can say effective political messaging usually draws a reader in to the cause, rather than preaching the superiority of the group (Smith & Petty, 1996). Of course, this holds the mechanisms of effective messaging in conflict with the core message of any fascist group – that of their superiority.

We can resolve some of this tension that presents in the Wellington Protest signs through two mechanisms of understanding. Firstly, there were positive messages regarding the protesters and their movement, intended to be read by the protestors themselves as a form of *internal* communication. Early on in the protest however, particularly in the convoy where the political aim was to gather support whilst moving throughout the country, many of the messages could be seen as effective whether they attempt to communicate externally *or* internally. Figure 12: *WE ARE MOTHERS HEAR US ROAR!*; Figure 6: *I'm not a Racist I'm not an activist I AM A KIWI!!* ; and Figure 13: *DOUBLE VAXXED I AM NOT THE MINORITY* are all emblematic examples of the early-stage signs trying to forge a perception both internally to the in-group and to external viewership of what demographics and messages the group is comprised of and does so in the classic mode of traditional political messaging.

Second, the messaging became more radicalised, cohesive, and also more removed from mainstream perspectives. This was a trend that came into play particularly as the group became embedded on Parliament grounds and became more antagonistic towards authorities. As the forged group's social identity had started to move messaging away further from what might be deemed acceptable to a wider public, there was a form of one-upmanship as to who could prove they were the most dedicated to the cause, the most informed of every online conspiracy, and the most willing to dehumanise their perceived opposition. A good example of this is Figure 14: *JACINDA KLAUS SCHWAB AND THE GLOBALISTS AGENDA 2030 THE GREAT RESET DEPOPULATE THE EARTH ONE WORLD GOVERNMENT SOCIAL CREDIT MONETARY SYSTEM YOU WILL OWN NOTHING NO FREEDOM NO RIGHTS NO PRIVACY NO LAND MURDERING MAGGOTS.*

By this time, some of the protest messaging had radicalised to the point where the internal group-focused rhetoric positioned itself not only against government officials, but also banded together in defiance against what they saw as a vast, international conspiratorial agenda. This sort of radicalising over time tracks closely with Paxton's group primacy, whereby this point the remaining protestors had spent weeks travelling and camping on Parliament grounds for little political reward, yet seemed to be *increasing* their dedication to the group, in a manner that is reflective of the modern social media movements that scholars have identified as breeding grounds for contemporary fascism (Del Vicario et al., 2016; Fominaya, 2024; Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021)

As a form of contrast Figure 15: *I'M SORRY YOU HAD TO SHUT YOUR SHOP FOR PROTESTORS BUT I LOST MY JOB & MY HOME* is a perfect example of another useful method of understanding group primacy messages: the role of the martyr. The 'superior duties' of the group (ie. rejecting the vaccination) that scholars such as Paxton (1998) identify as key to bonding to a fascist movement had, according to this sign, lost them their job and

their home, leading to them joining in the protest on Parliament grounds. This form of behaviour would be well understood in the economical/psychological world of Prospect theory, which states that those attempting to ‘gain’ are much more risk averse, and those who have ‘lost’ tolerate much higher risk/lower reward in their behaviours (Levy, 1992). The factors of risk and loss form threads that link much theory of fascism throughout the years, with Brustein and Markovsky (1989) describing the risk of joining a fascist movement as largely rational as the movement itself becomes irrational beyond some critical mass. The person holding the sign, therefore, is, according to Prospect theory and rational understandings of fascism, much more likely to tolerate the high level of risk of putting their entire life on hold and throw their identity in with a group that is promising an indefinite protest, advocating for the small likelihood of forcing legislative change.

Given these understandings of risk too, we must place the Wellington Protest in temporal context: that is, coming at the tail end of a once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic (Shi et al., 2020) where there was not only a significant death toll, but many people’s livelihoods were turned upside down due to the global economic impacts and the psychological toll of nationwide lockdowns (Every-Palmer et al., 2020). In these circumstances there was more likely to be a portion of the population that were feeling the impacts of significant loss (Levy, 1997), and thus more vulnerable to taking what seems a risky gamble in a convoy to the Capital to try and regain their old life back *without* getting vaccinated, a risk they saw as outweighing the protest. This is expressed in Figure 16: *HEALTHY KIDS is NATURAL IMMUNITY RISKY VAX DEADLY!*

If risk is considered the social force that *pushes* individuals into fascist movements, then scholarly analyses into senses of identity and group belonging offer explanation as to the *pull* that keeps people there. The feeling of belonging to a group is a powerful and innate human drive (Tajfel, 1974), long-studied in the area of Social Psychology as Social Identity

Theory, which states that people derive self-esteem by tying their identity to the in-group of which they are a part of, and in opposite to the out-group of which they see as direct competition. The stronger the identity is tied to this in-group, the stronger these effects are present, especially so if the group identity is founded on being a minority in some way (Brewer et al., 2013). This may go some way to explaining the appeal of the Wellington Protest. In their analysis of inter-war Italian fascist documents, Piraino and Fiorito (2009) hone in on the appeal of fascism as the restoration of *order*, opposed to traditionalist politics or the Communist revolutions happening elsewhere at the time.² The notion of a restoration of order back to *how it has always been* would be a powerful emotional pull for those wishing to become part of this movement. Coming at the tail end of the second series of difficult lockdowns to limit the damage of a once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic, the promise of restoring norms and laws back to what they were has a similar pull of comfort and stability in an unstable time as interwar fascism offered Italians.

During the convoy stage of the Wellington Protest, we can see there is significant positive messaging regarding the protest group itself early on, even when the messaging also includes other aspects of overlapping social identities. This is evident in Figure 17: *WE SPEAK FOR ALL TAMARIKI*; Figure 18: *UNITE 4 FREEDOM WE ♥ TRUCKIES*; and Figure 19: *WE ARE THE PUBLIC TOO*. Phrasing the communication in this way shows that in the first week or so, the groups present were framing their communication in regards to identity as both external and welcoming to any wavering members of outgroups who may have sympathy. This manner of messaging during the convoy phase is effective political messaging to establish a broad church, inclusive identity that tracks the traditional hui-esque nature of the convoy – a Māori protest that aims to collect support as it works its way down

² *Revolution* is defined here as a sudden sharp change in the social seat of political power, expressed as transformation of government, perceptions of legitimacy, and the social order of society (Kamenka, 1966).

the country (O'Brien & Huntington, 2022). Framing the movement as inclusive early on, typified by Figure 20: *DIFFERENT OPINIONS SAME PRINCIPLE FREEDOM*, allows the best possible chance for groups that may differ on many aspects to subsume these differences in the name of common cause and do so in the manner of coalescing political movements that can become fascism (Russell, 2022).

This is incongruent, however, with other portions of messaging of the protestors, which had a significant libertarian, individualistic freedom stance. The simple sign of Figure 21: *FREEDOM* and its many derivatives were by far the most common sign in my primary materials. This is more in line with 1990's post-fascists whose stated political goals were simply to revolt against the state, despite being part of the ruling government of the time (Berezin, 2018). In this manner, the fascist ideology of the Wellington Protest offers a win-win identity to be a part of for those present. They are the moral arbiters preaching for a united New Zealand, yet are free of the consequences of the social contract. In this manner, the fascist nature of rebirth emerges. The goal here is the perpetual victimhood of revolt against the state, to be reborn in *their* image. This other aspect took prominence as the protest became entrenched in the occupation phase as the framing of their identity as one of a beleaguered minority group in opposition to the government and wider society began to take over. There were direct messages to members of the public they felt they had been unable to convince, as demonstrated by Figure 22: *IF YOU AREN'T AN ACTIVIST DURING THIS TIME IN HISTORY KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT & GET OUT OF THE WAY OF THOSE OF US WHO ARE FIGHTING YOUR BATTLES AS WELL*, and global conspiracy theories taking hold as seen in Figure 23: *WE ARE Q WWGIWGA*, and even more New Zealand focused conspiracies focused on denigrating the outgroup shown in Figure 24: *CLARKE MIGHT LIKE IT UP THE ASS... BUT WE DON'T*.

There was an interesting and large component of denigrating the outgroup to boost self-esteem in messages written in chalk. These took place in two manners: firstly, on cars/campervans with blackboard paint and, secondly, on the walls and concrete steps heading up towards Parliament. There is one particular example of messaging that gives insight into the group dynamics at play: a horse float stringing along New Zealand flags, finished in chalk paint with a large Qanon stylised 'Q', a photoshop of a smiling Jacinda Ardern in a prison cell, and a large slogan stating *JABCINDA YOUR TAXI IS HERE*. This example offers insight due its appearance at the arrival of the convoy on 9 February (see Figure 25) when it was completely clean, and then later on 17 February (see Figure 26) when it was covered in hundreds of individual chalk messages. The horse float represents a track record of internal communication within the group and, whilst there are a range of messages present, ranging from the supportive to the denigrative, each message forms an implicit endorsement of the trailer itself, suggesting that Ardern should be sent to prison in the most humiliating way possible.

Understanding the formation of identity through *opposition* – synthesizing both Berezin's (2018) revolt against the state, and the self-creation of alienation (Chambers, 2023) offers a pathway to understanding how the fascist identity is formed by constructing a sense of self purely through a shared sense of being *anti* the same group of people. In the case of the Wellington Protest we can see that the protest was defined by groups with disparate agendas coming together and, like previous and contemporaneous fascist movements (Russell, 2022), were united by their opposition to the status quo Government (O'Brien & Huntington, 2022). Looking for evidence in the signs, there is very little construction of a standalone self-identity, with the vast majority of signs creating an identity as *being opposed* to something else. Although there were some exceptions, such as Figure 27: *TOOT FOR FARMERS!*; Figure 28: *WE THE PEOPLE NEED TO UNITE NEIGHBOURS*

COMMUNITIES GOOD FOLK STAND: SPEAK; and Figure 29: *I STAND FOR THE: TAMARIKI PEOPLE PEACE AND OUR FREEDOM!!!*, these examples are the small, if not tiny, minority of messaging that attempt to state what the group is *for* and who they are, rather than what or whom the group is *against*, as evidenced in my initial data gathering.

In contrast, the overwhelming majority of group messaging constructs an identity in the negative space, placing oneself as the opposition to another, as shown by Figure 30: *DO NOT COMPLY*. Defining a group identity in this oppositional manner created the powerful social dynamics in Wellington, temporarily overriding individual identity and causing the protest to remain relatively fractured and leaderless. If the only requirement of being part of a group is that you are in opposition to something, then we can analyse some of the contradictions in group behaviour that seem to have been less of a problem in the Wellington Protest than we otherwise might have expected.

The IPCA report into Police conduct during the occupation outlined the leaderless nature of the protest and the difficulties this posed to Police attempts to communicate and negotiate (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2023). At face value, this seems at odds with a nascent fascist movement, the public perception of which is intrinsic to authoritarian – nearly always male – rule and unwavering loyalty (Pinto et al., 2007). It is important to keep in mind that the Wellington Protest only reached the first stage of Paxton’s fascism (Paxon, 1998), and therefore we must allow some leeway for understanding how many of these movements can coalesce in the first place. Looking toward the signs for insight, we can see Figure 31: *Freedom of choice* being held up next to Figure 32: *TRUMP Q SENT US*, tinorangatiratanga flags flying next to groups of MAGA hats, and Christian allegory in Figure 33: *SATAN IS ARDERNS DADDY* next to messages of Māori independence conveyed in Figure 34: *DECLARATION OF MAORI INDEPENDENCE STANDS. MAORI LAWS PRE 1840 ARE LEGITAMOTE EVEN IF MY SPELLING ANT*. We can reconcile the seemingly at-

odds and scattershot messaging by understanding the protest's identity as *anti-government* rather than *for* a particular message (Berezin, 2018). In the adage of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' we can see that, for the convoy and occupation, there was an acceptance wide range of issues and perspectives, as long as the message was anti-government and especially if it was anti-Labour and anti-Ardern, who – as a woman – faced the most vitriolic of all the messaging present at the Wellington Protest.

Fear of Liberalism

Whilst less immediately obvious and overt, messaging involving the dread of decadence and fear of individualistic, cosmopolitan liberalism is a key component of fascist thought (Paxton, 1998) and formed a key undercurrent of many of the signs present at the Wellington Protest. This railing against cosmopolitan liberalism is an oft-misunderstood gateway to the reactionary, conformist, and uniformed image of the latter stages of fascist movements. Piraino & Fiorito (2009) hone in on the concept of work being the source of moral value and pride for fascism, something that tracks closely with signs present at the Wellington Protest, with the alleged inability of protestors to either work or run a business being a strong theme throughout, aptly illustrated by Figure 35: *LET PEOPLE WORK* and Figure 36: *END MANDATES KEEP WORKMATES*. There is a sense of self-creation of identity by those during the Wellington Protest to manufacture themselves the image not of the proletariat, but, instead, a slice of *true society* that manifested the ideals of some form of united kiwi-dom, as shown by Figure 37: *THIS IS NOT THE KIWI WAY!*.

This is where the 'dread of decadence' finds its place as a key message of early-stage fascism, a call to warning that society has become too lazy, too accepting of government offerings, and too complacent of government excess. This message has power not only in re-establishing the worker as the source of national pride, but frequently concentrates on children/future generations in order to manifest fear. Talking points, such as the decrying of

low birth rates having their origins as far back as even a century ago (Forcucci, 2010), survive to be repurposed as a central theme today in alt-right/neo-fascist ‘white erasure’ conspiracies (Obaidi et al., 2022). Although birth-rates are not mentioned explicitly during the protest, there are numerous references to children, and health urging New Zealanders to rise up and take action against the then-Labour Government.

Appeals to emotion through a focus on children are present extensively throughout the protest, but emerge most prominently during the convoy phase, as attested by Figure 38: *LEAVE OUR KIDS ALONE*; Figure 39: *HANDS OFF OUR CHILDREN HONK 4 FREEDOM*, and Figure 40: *PLEASE DONT ALLOW THEM TO POISON ♥ YOUR ♥ TAMARIKI. PROTECT THEM*, which convey messages typical of those displayed on cars, campervans, and overpasses in the early phases. There is a libertarian slant to this type of language, invoking concepts, such as personal freedom and the rights of children, yet the vagueness of this messaging is key to gaining insight as to why children have, for a hundred years, been the topic de jour of fascist movements (Forcucci, 2010).

Invoking children transforms them into an unwitting avatar in which the virtues of the family unit can be extolled. Long enmeshed in fascist movement thinking, the family unit forms one of the core *family, community, region* (Payne, 1996) mantra on which fascism is based. Maintaining this traditional family unit, therefore, is a core goal of those who see modern trends such as single parent and queer families as the harbingers of what Paxton refers to as ‘cosmopolitan liberalism’ (Paxton, 1998. p. 6), with tight family units forming small buttresses against these trends for those who wish to live more conservatively in ‘traditional’ family units.

Yet, the prominence of ‘protect the children’ messaging was at odds with the danger they were in. Unlike other devastating pandemics, such as the Spanish Influenza, children were at low risk of harm from Covid compared to the general population (Bhopal et al., 2021;

Tognotti, 2009). Knowing this allows us to understand the twin prongs of messaging around children during the Wellington Protest; that is, that the vaccine was higher risk than Covid-19 and that their children depended on them. This is captured in Figure 41: *My MuM can't take me to my favourite camp spot, the cinema, the library (I love reading), my sports, the swimming pools. I MiSS Seeing people. It's Not Fair. NZ it's time for change!!!* This sign is an encapsulation of what the messaging, which supposedly advocates for protecting children, was trying to accomplish: freedom from consequences for the parent. Allowing of course for those who live in rural or car-dependant areas, most of the activities listed by the child (or whomever wrote this sign) are easily accessible by public transport, bike, walking, or simply being dropped off by their own or a friends' parent. Taking this further, we can analyse the logic of the sign as presented for us to understand: that a child is both old and politically enough aware to write this sign (including the slogan *it's time for change!!!*), that they are unable to enter a cinema, library, sports ground or pool without their parent, but cannot due to their parent's vaccine status, that they miss seeing people, and that their situation is unfair. I would argue that only the final two points could be unequivocally true, and that this sign is evidence of parents in the Wellington Protest using their children as leverage to enact the political goal of ending mandates, something that *is* deeply unfair for any child involved.

There is this underlying tension and hypocrisy in the way these signs are supposedly advocating for children who cannot yet legally make their own decisions around vaccinations and using children themselves to make this point. This is present not only in the many signs referencing protecting children, or the signs written by children, but in the way even very young children are holding some of the most incendiary messages, such as Figure 42:

POLICE COMPLICIT WITH ♥ MURDER ♥ Please protect my friends. This pattern of children seeming to hold the most controversial signs is something that affected me during my initial encounter with the protest on the Napier/Taupo road, when it occurred to me that,

whilst driving past a roundabout filled with children holding signs, those who wished to counter-protest immediately face an uncomfortable power imbalance if any confrontation involving yelling at children.

Violence as Mobilising Force

The final mobilising passion described by Paxton involves the use of violence to keep the group/movement alive as it fights for survival (Paxton, 1998). Yet, both the intensity and the culprit of violence in regards to the Wellington Protest are points of contention. My data collection from media sources certainly paint the movement as violent, particularly on the final day, though there is probably a sampling bias involved since the media has a financial incentive to pick the most sensational pictures to publish. Still, the IPCA report outlines 82 injuries (six serious) caused to Police by protestors (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2023) and there were certainly skirmishes between Police and the occupying group throughout the weeks they were encamped on Parliament grounds. The contention stems from the fact that the protest itself was embedded with constant messages about how non-violent it was, and that any violence was caused by the Police. This is expressed in Figure 43: *WELCOME COME IN PEACE ALCOHOL FREE DRUG FREE KIDS FRIENDLY RESPECT ALL STAND STRONG SPREAD LOVE BE FREE*; Figure 44: *THIS IS A PEACEFUL PROTEST NO MORE VIOLENCE PLEASE POLICE*; and Figure 45: *Stay peaceful Stop Mandates*.

The media portrayals and the Police reports are at odds with how the protest presented themselves as non-violent but firm in their beliefs. We can resolve these differences by understanding the mechanism of activating violence, or what Paxton calls the Darwinian attempt to survive. The violence came when the group felt most threatened. This was illustrated early on when a Police attempt to clear Parliament grounds at 3.30am on 21 February failed, a week before the actual end of the occupation. By all accounts, Police were

turned back by members of the Wellington Occupation throwing faeces (Checkpoint, 2022), which was picked up very quickly by media, and tied in with other news stories at the time around poor sanitation at the encampment. Later that morning, a sign appeared very prominently near the front lines of the protest. Figure 46: *WE NEVER FLUNG ANY POOP* shows that the protestors were aware of the need to keep the moral high ground when it came to altercations with the Police, lest they risk their image as the peaceful protest. By understanding Paxton's illustration of victimhood being the justification of all and any actions, the protest's self-positioning as permanent victims was such an integral aspect of both their moral superiority to outsiders and internally for morale, that it was necessary to dispute how they prevented Police from clearing them from Parliament grounds, which would normally be cause for celebration in an occupying protest. This intrinsically linked push-pull of self-preservation and violence reached its conclusion on 3 March. As a large and well-equipped Police force appeared to clear Parliament grounds, the occupying protestors lit fires, dug up paving stones to throw at Police, and were involved in several skirmishes as the existential threat to the group's existence prompted the highest levels of violence (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2023). This aspect should not have been a surprise to the Police if they understood the movement as fascist. Peters (2020) describes the relishing of violence in fascist movements and outlines the Darwinian activation of violence by fascist groups who see its use as intrinsic to its survival. If Police understood this dynamic, then perhaps they could have found other ways to clear Parliament grounds that did not result in the injuring of 82 of their Officers.

Written Intent of Violence

Even when the Police appeared as restrained as possible, the Wellington Occupation was not devoid of violence. Clues pointing towards the predilections of some present were ever present in their messaging: with the infamous post-WWII trial of Nazi officers (Taylor,

1955) being referenced in Figure 47: *JABCINDA NUREMBURG CODE IS GOING TO GET YOU!* and Figure 48: *NUREMBERG 2 WILL BE A BLAST Labour Govt.* The part of the Nuremburg trial these signs were advocating for becomes clear when many that mention Nuremburg had nooses drawn on or made up rope nooses attached. Some on the same topic gave up all pretence or attempts to disguise meaning and got to the point more directly, as seen in Figure 49: *HANG THEM ALL* and Figure 50: *HANG 'EM HIGH*. The cohesive nature and prevalence of the Nuremburg messaging seems to indicate that this was a notable talking point in the community of the protest, especially during the period of 17 - 20 February, when the size of the protest swelled significantly. There is no wiggle room for interpreting the meaning of these signs as they were explicitly advocating for the hanging of political figures in New Zealand, in particular Prime Minister Ardern, as well as members of the wider Labour Party, in a manner that recent scholarly work describes as the increasing use of the murder fantasy meme on the extreme right (Askanius & Keller, 2021).

Yet once again, the self-positioning of the protestors as permanent victims forms the protest's justification of advocating this extreme violence. A picture of Jacinda is placed next to the Christchurch mass-shooter and they are described on equal terms by Figure 51: *New Zealand mass-murderers*. Ardern is described as having even significantly more 'victims' than the worst mass-murderer in New Zealand history. Given this extreme language, the comparison is unlikely to persuade the average fence-sitter who may catch sight of the sign on the news or social media. What it does do, however, is talk in (Barclay, 2015) to those already present at the protest, whom by definition of being there are likely more committed to the cause than a person watching from the comfort of their couch. This type of sign hint darkly towards a form of extremist clout-chasing where the murder meme (Askanius & Keller, 2021) is designed not to convince outsiders of its truth, but to convince insiders in

gigantic, international extremist social networks of one's dedication to the cause (Schulze et al., 2022; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023).

By holding signs that accuse various politicians, Police, and members of the public service as (mass) murderers, the Occupation justifies its war-like invocation of the Nuremberg Code by placing itself on a war-like footing. The messaging of the occupation extensively parallels itself with the ANZAC's, the most iconic war hero imagery in New Zealand. Figure 52: *THIS IS OUR HOUR THIS IS OUR GALLIPOLI* simultaneously accusing Ardern of being equivalent to some of the most reviled war-figures and eras of the early-mid 20th century, such as Stalin, as seen in Figure 53: *STALINDA LIEBOUR FUCK OFF*, Hitler as seen in Figure 54: *Adolf Ardern*, and pre-reform South Africa as seen in Figure 55: *END APARTHEID WE GO HOME*. Characterising the figures of protest in this way allows infinite scope of justification because, after all, war operates under different rules (Gutteridge, 1949). The Allies, to whom the protest saw themselves aligned with morally, undertook the Nuremberg trial process as a means of applying the veneer of judicial legitimacy in order to enact vengeance against those they accused of committing crimes against the peace and crimes against humanity (Rogers, 2016; Taylor, 1955). In Wellington, the justification of brandishing signs containing a hangman's noose was there same, except the outcome was pre-determined, as illustrated by Figure 56: *JABCINDA CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY GUILTY!*

In addition to the targeting of political figures, the media became a target of ire in several signs, specifically Figure 57: *NZ MEDIA part of GENOCIDAL MURDER* and Figure 58: *666 → MEDIA.*, Whilst not explicitly threatening violence, these signs should be examined within the wider context in which they were displayed. A sign being displayed accusing a group (without evidence) of genocidal murder is problematic, but when it is displayed amongst multiple signs referencing the Nuremberg Trials, where *punishment* was

given to those found guilty of ‘*genocidal murder*,’ transforms the sign from defamatory to implicitly threatening violence. Those at the protest viewed media at best suspiciously and, at worst, advocated for the elimination of media, including in Figure 59: *THE MEDIA IS THE VIRUS*. This is indicative of the fragmentation of fascist discourse, which will be discussed later on, in which plausible deniability is possible when examining signs *individually*, but any knowledgeable viewer will understand the meaning as a *collective*.

Likewise, the New Zealand Police, who largely took a restrained approach to the protestors generally, were another major target of signs that either implied or directly threatened violence. Figure 42: *POLICE COMPLICIT WITH <3 MURDER <3 Please protect my friends* is a murder-meme message (Askanius & Keller, 2021) that self-justifies violence in advance. It implies that Police have murdered before, will do so again, and calls for anyone who believes the sign to be ready to protect themselves. This sign is clearly designed to elicit strong emotional responses, not just because of the message, but because it was written to be held by a very young girl. This makes the “*Please protect my friends*” portion even more urgent to the reader as the child is presumably accusing the police of trying to murder *her* friends (small children).

To explain *why* some of this messaging was so violent, it is necessary to return to Paxton’s (1998) definition of the final ‘mobilising passion’: namely – the use of violence and will as the group struggles to survive. The three groups targeted by threats of violence are the ones most cogent to the Wellington Protest’s success as a burgeoning fascist movement, with the media influencing essential wider public support, the government and particularly Prime Minister Ardern being the ones with the power to change the laws, and the Police who had both the legal authority and physical means to stop the protest before it could grow. The sum of these threats of violence is intimidatory or, in sport parlance, to ‘*work the ref*’. Calling the media biased and a tool of the state right from the very first day of the protest, signs such as

Figure 60: *MEDIA IS GOVT CONTROLLED SUSTAINED PROPAGANDA* enable any negative coverage to be reframed as simply another part of the protest's perpetual victimhood. Pressuring the Police and calling them violent after any and every encounter made those in charge wary of any confrontation, lest they appeared as aggressors. This achieved a cautious media seeking to avoid looking biased, a Police force reticent to engage with force, and a group that was allowed to become firmly entrenched on Parliament grounds based on the strength of their messaging alone. This point of view has been bolstered by contemporary scholarly work from Marcks & Pawelz (2022), who argue the perpetual state of self-victimhood in far-right movements allows them to view themselves as constantly in a state of peril and where the use violence becomes not only justified but *logically necessary*.

Once entrenched in their state of imperilment, those present at the protest felt safe enough to brandish signs accusing the government of committing the worst crimes in humanity while advocating punishments to match. One sign in particular, Figure 61: *JACINDA BE KIND TALK WITH THE PEOPLE!!*, stands out as one of the only seemingly genuine attempts to reach out to the Prime Minister. Yet, Paxton (1998) points out that any political allyship with a fascist movement is integral for any such movement to gain a long-term political foothold, making Arden's lack of meeting a likely moderating factor in not escalating the protest further. Additionally, Fascism comes to power through melding the energy of its support base through conservative parties, *not* the left. Understanding this, and the wider context of communication, leaves doubts on the authenticity of the sign's meaning. Concurrently with the imploring sign above, Arden's face also adorned a horse-float-come-jail-cell, had been overlaid with Nazi imagery on multiple signs, and featured by name in multiple places calling for Nuremberg trials, complete with a ready noose. It is reasonable to be sceptical that a sign displayed in this crowd was a genuine no-strings-attached attempt at a good faith discussion.

As Marcks & Pawelz (2022) establish, we can see that messages of violence go hand-in-hand with signs that catastrophise. Figure 62: *THE ONLY REASON THEY CAN COME FOR YOUR CHILD IS BECAUSE YOU SUBMITTED FIRST* leaves no room for negotiation. It frames Paxton's "Darwinian struggle" (Paxton, 1998. p. 7) as the lived reality for those present at the occupation, with threats of violence against Police, Media and the Government proof of the devotion to the group of the most dedicated members, a declaration that they would not give an inch. The threats of violence were not an edge case of the most extreme at the protest. The Nuremberg signs were being displayed prominently across multiple days, meaning the signs were either tolerated, accepted, normalised, or a combination of the above. Whilst everyone at the occupation may have not been so outwardly supportive of threats of violence, putting the Police and media on the back foot allowed the movement to survive longer and served the objectives of everyone present. There is evidence, too, that during the final day on 3 March, as the police threat to the Occupation became tangible, the violence ratcheted up, making good on the promises displayed so prominently on signs throughout the protest. As Figure 63: *I'D RATHER DIE ON MY FEET THAN LIVE ON MY KNEES* forewarns, they would use violence and give no quarter.

Fascist Communication

Despite the protestors' emotional catharsis of being able to finally speak their mind and protest the vaccine, mandates, and a myriad of other issues, the majority of the signs contained statements that were misleading, designed to sow doubt, or were simply objectively untrue, including Figure 64: *YOU CAN'T CATCH A VIRUS*. This is a key component of fascism: that a lie can make it halfway around the world before the truth has tied up its shoes. Understanding the various ways in which words can lie is fundamental to parsing out the linguistic techniques and messages at the Wellington Protest, establishing where these

messages originated from and the political objectives that types of untruths, as well as propaganda more generally, achieve.

Misinformation

Established as a distinct political problem by Kuklinski et al. (2000), misinformation is broadly understood as the confident broadcast of incorrect fact-based beliefs. If information is data combined with meaning (Stahl, 2006), then at its most fundamental, misinformation can be defined as messages or statements that are not true, but could be *thought* to be true by whomever is putting the message out there (Guess & Lyons, 2020). There is, therefore, the ability to parse out misinformation compared to other forms of untrue statements by applying an epistemology of charitable interpretation of intent, where an incorrect source of information leads to an incorrect, if earnest, conclusion. With regards to the signs of the Wellington Protest specifically, I coded a split in the written form and emotional nature of the signs depending on if they were either mis or disinformation. Misinformation tended to be hand-written as an outward manifestation of emotional display, as seen in Figure 65: *HEALTHY KIDS is NATURAL IMMUNITY RISKY VAX DEADLY!*, whereas those signs that appeared to have intentional aspects of disinformation seemed to be written as attempts to induce emotion in the reader, frequently in a rhetorically questioning manner. This is seen in Figure 66: *Natural Immunity or Natural Selection??*

In terms of misinformation, there was also a correlation in Wellington between signs that I coded as misinformation and the handwritten nature of a sign. Whether this is due to the emotional component – the catharsis of getting the message out on a sign for the world to see – or some other aspect is unclear, but a sign such as Figure 67: *NATURAL IMMUNITY 99.6% EFFECTIVE!!* is clearly delivered passionately, with the all-caps, underlined statistic, and exclamations at the end. However, the source they quote is a disinformation website that offers little peer-reviewed science or attempts to base claims on objective truths, something

that Guess and Lyons (2020) pinpointed as hallmarks of faux-journalistic websites that are the origin point for the superspreading of misinformation. It seems that this sign is specifically referring to the death rate from earlier strains of covid, which were as posted on the sign on a global, unvaccinated average. It ignores, however, the long-term effects that covid, particularly severe bouts, could have on anyone, especially the vulnerable, with Woodrow et al. (2023) finding long covid rates between 3.0-11.7% across anyone infected with covid. To this person holding their sign, focusing on a context-stripped, cherry-picked statistic enables them to spread the message that, because natural immunity is so effective against dying from Covid-19, the implication is that the lockdowns and vaccination mandates are not necessary, or do not outweigh supposed costs.

Disinformation

Despite its unique notoriety post-2016 and the election of Donald Trump (Ross & Rivers, 2018), disinformation is simply misinformation with the *intent* to deceive (Stahl, 2006). Disinformation at the Wellington Protest tended to be less emotional and more closely resembling traditional political, sloganistic language. There is a correlation between signs that appear designed to deceive and those that were printed and disseminated amongst the protest. This would be congruent with the *intent* being key in determining the difference between mis and disinformation (Stahl, 2006). Prepared as a printed sign, this messaging must have been somewhat considered and crafted. Figure 68: *DELTAOMICRON → MEDIA CONTROL* is an example of a printed sign mimicking the official covid messaging, with clear effort to depict an anagram that the sign-holder wanted to show was important.

Early on during the convoy, pre-made signs were less common proportionally, confined to bumper stickers and Voices For Freedom signage. Figure 69: *ONE MILLION KIWIS ARE NOT JABBED* from VFF stands out as attempting to convince based on deliberate twisting of vaccination coverage. At the time, there were approximately 15% of

New Zealanders who were ineligible for the vaccine, the vast majority of which were young children deemed at low risk (Spray & Samaniego, 2023). This is in contrast to the surrounding, handwritten, emotional signs written on trucks and cars, as seen in Figure 38: *LEAVE OUR KIDS ALONE*. The disinformation comes in the planning and *deliberate* misrepresentation of facts, which attempts to frame the unvaccinated (due to age) as assumedly unvaccinated because they are ideologically in agreement with the Wellington Protest. Figure 70: *POLITICAL LANGUAGE IS DESIGNED TO MAKE LIES SOUND TRUTHFUL!* is an insightful sign that was present at Parliament, but possibly not in the way it was intended. Instead of its presumed intent, which was to attack the government messaging around covid, it offers a perfect one-sentence summation of how the carefully crafted signs that it was surrounded by present themselves as the *true* truth whilst being largely based on cherry-picked truths at best and deliberate disinformation at worst.

‘Doublespeak’ as Fascist Deception

‘Doublespeak’ is a third concept that applies specifically to fascist language, but is a more nebulous concept than misinformation and disinformation. With its calculated ambivalence pertaining to *whom exactly the target is* (Richardson, 2017), double-speak allows for plausible deniability where, for instance, a message on a sign read by an outside observer may have one interpretation, but the true message is layered with subtext that only someone embedded in the movement’s specific language would understand.

The clearest cases of doublespeak in the Wellington Protest are those involving the Nuremburg code/trials, such as Figure 71: *NUREMBERG TRIAL WILL HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE*, where outside observers – even those who are aware of the history of the post-WWII trials (Rogers, 2016; see also Taylor, 1955) – are more likely to interpret the concept of a ‘trial’ as something that is fair, objective, and to a majority of external viewers something that would exonerate those who were responsible for the vaccine mandates, given

that they did not commit any war crimes/crimes against humanity. However, to a large section of those who were likely at the protest, the topic of the Nuremberg trials had been a talking point in the covid conspiracy sphere since the start of pandemic measures in 2020 as a means of retribution against those who were prominent figures in the public health responses to covid globally (Önnerfors, 2021). The phrasing and language for these protestors had a completely different interpretation and background history than would be expected of someone outside the internal language of the group. For these people, invoking the name of Nuremberg meant not a trial, but retribution, with a forgone conclusion and a punishment of hanging, as seen in Figure 48: *“NUREMBERG 2 WILL BE A BLAST Labour Govt.* The phrasing of such signs as Figure 71 *WILL HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE* dismisses the idea of an objective analysis or judgement of the impacts of the global public health measures, discarding these instead for show-trials that are the typical tools of fascism as a co-opted justice system is turned against their political enemies (Klinkhammer, 2010), something alluded to in Figure 57: *NZ MEDIA part of GENOCIDAL MURDER.* The nature of punishment is predetermined, with the majority of signs referencing the Nuremberg trials containing drawings of nooses. Other signs say the explicit part out loud without referencing Nuremberg itself, as did Figure 72: *REMEMBER You are never too important to be hanged for TREASON!*, which functions as a signifier of some scholar’s belief that the current international fascist movement has reached a stage of maturity that it no longer needs to rely on double-speak to spread their messages (Stoll, 2021). We can see that each sign on the Nuremberg topic forms one part of a cohesive story in which those in charge (and their supposed enablers) have committed genocide through vaccine mandates and lockdowns will be found guilty via trial with a predetermined outcome, and the punishment will be capital in nature. Yet, no singular sign tells this entire story. Instead, we have snippets of the story, sliced into segments of doublespeak for the purposes of plausible deniability. The signs on

this topic will accuse parties but not explain the mechanism of punishment, predispose guilt but not disclose the crime, or call for hanging as punishment without naming the punished, but *never* are all three aspects present. The cohesive whole narrative forms from these various aspects being presented together. Undoubtedly, a large chunk of the protestors present will be aware of this full narrative being presented given the frequency of which it was discussed in gigantic online communities (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019).

Yet, despite the clear collective message, this nature of fascist doublespeak leads to the fracturing of the true intent into hints and oblique references being presented on signs. This difference comes in the *space* that the signs take place in. Unlike private telegram channels and Facebook groups, the writers and holders of signs at the Wellington Protest know that they will be presented in media and discourse spaces that they do not control. We are subsequently then left with each sign on these doublespeak topics (Richardson, 2017) becoming a trigger for a fuller story in the way that a modern meme or pop-culture reference does (Bebić & Volarevic, 2018), where an in-joke becomes shorthand for a larger story of which only knowledgeable readers are aware. The circular nature of the Wellington signage, where online narratives are split into real-world fragments only to be re-broadcasted back into their online communities, creates a further incentive for doublespeak where not only are they putting topics unpalatable to the wider public on signs under the guise of plausible deniability, but these signs can be reuploaded to communities that *are* aware of the full story. They gain clout by showing that they can broadcast a topic as serious as advocating the hanging of Members of Parliament and government officials out in the open to be shown on television. By fracturing the signs in this way, real-world signs are shared online to become easter eggs for increasing clout, telling a full narrative with a few words, but comprehensible only to those who, in the manner of a comic book collector, have a near encyclopaedic knowledge of the history, narrative and *lore* of what this snippet of narrative may mean.

Finding Validity in Emotion – Not Truth

It can also be easy to become bogged down in the minutia of definition when discussing messaging from the Wellington Protest. Whilst signs present can undoubtedly be slotted into the categories of mis and disinformation, the vast majority do not pretend to require truths at all (Persily et al., 2020). Instead of mis-applied facts or deliberate deception, most of the signs relied on emotion and emotional responses, rather than pretence of any form of objective fact, made up or not. This tracks closely with Paxton (1998), who describes Fascism as being propelled by feelings more than thought (p.6), and other scholars who describe the emotional aspects of engaging in conspiracy as essential to the birth and ongoing energies of fascist movements (Bergmann, 2018; Chambers, 2023).

Many of the signs designed to invoke emotional reactions are indicative more of the writer's own views than objective truth. Figure 73: *AT NO POINT IN HISTORY HAVE THE PEOPLE FORCING OTHERS INTO COMPLIANCE BEEN THE GOOD GUYS* is clearly and fundamentally untrue. Every modern society is built on a system of laws and a justice system that enforces compliance. In a democratic society, these usually come in the form of laws that over time reflect the will of the people who elected those that write the laws. Just as seatbelts are the law because they reduce harm in the event of a crash, and are enforced through fines, so too was the vaccine mandated to reduce harm in certain high contact professions, such as teaching, border control, and jobs where there could be immune compromised interactions, including the healthcare and retirement sectors (Romero Starke et al., 2020). More bluntly, every single law in every country is a forced form of compliance, rendering the sign not based on any pretence of fact, but rather a manifestation of their own opinion of the unfairness of their situation applied erroneously across history.

The purpose of language such as this is not to establish validity in *truth*, but rather validity in *feeling*, creating the conditions for self-justifying any action, so long as the

audience believes it. The violent actions of the occupation on the final day (Hannah et al., 2022) were prefaced and justified in advance by signs such as Figure 74: *Police State?* and others that depict officers dressed up as the SS officers of Nazi Germany. Figure 75 *I WAS JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS* is one such example. During the early stages of the protest, New Zealand Police were issuing trespass and illegal parking notices to protestors, but the protestors saw this and responded, as Figure 73: *FORCED COMPLIANCE* shows, by crafting the narrative around how they *felt* as if they were suffering oppression similar to the victims of Nazi-era Germany. Dovetailing with this too was the *feeling* of society being cleaved in two, with many signs referencing the policies of Apartheid-era South Africa as a parallel for their situation. This is evident in Figure 76: *PASSPORTS + CERTIFICATES = APARTHEID* and Figure 55: *END APARTHEID WE GO HOME*, despite the fact that remaining unvaccinated was fundamentally a choice of healthcare rather than a hierarchy built on racial/religious prejudice (Dubow, 2014).

We can see, however, that their feeling of being alienated from the rest of society is what forms the self-justification of the Wellington Protest's victimhood. This is where the substitution of truth for feeling in the purposes of justification of fascist movements bears fruition: the signs that imply vaccination is forced, including Figure 77: *PRO CHOICE* and Figure 78: *I OPPOSE FORCED INJECTIONS*, can co-opt the slogans and movements of the past because those present truly *felt* as if their situations are of the same magnitude. There are many heartfelt, emotional pleas for external readers to believe in the cause of the Wellington Protest. Figure 113: *"She forced you too, so please stand with us not against us"* in a manner that comes across authentically because they believe them wholeheartedly, not necessarily because they are *factually* true. This substitution of fact for feelings is a core aspect of populist messaging (Wirz, 2018), particularly when attempting to manufacture outrage, or

create a sense of victimhood, in a group that is aiming for supremacy (Marcks & Pawelz, 2022).

These feelings-as-facts create permission space for a form of vagueness that allows the repetition of falsehood to spread across a protest, with messages such as Figure 38: *LEAVE OUR KIDS ALONE* being emotive and direct, but ultimately unclear as to *what* they want them being left alone from. If anything, children at the time were largely unvaccinated anyway due to the low risk (Spray & Samaniego, 2023), with parents having no say in the issue. This powerful feeling enables talking in two incongruent ways at once: the collective messaging of the protest demanding that children be left alone being displayed next to Figure 79: *ONE MILLION KIWIS ARE NOT JABBED*, ie. plenty aren't vaccinated anyway so it is not an issue.

Political Function of Anti-Government Rhetoric

It is important to assess what the *function* of misinformation, disinformation, and doublespeak is. This chapter has largely been concerned with *how* the signs are constructed message-wise and their *style*, but these are fundamentally ways of presenting an argument, rather than the argument itself. The sum of all language present posits the argument that the government is diabolical, committing crimes against New Zealand, and needs to be replaced, possibly by violent means as called for by Figure 80: *IT'S A POLITICAL OPERATION COVID 19 IS STATE TERRORISM*.

These core messages are essential to the goal of the protest, which is less about repealing the vaccine mandate specifically (although that is certainly an aspect) and more about eroding the average viewer's trust in the government and institutions, thus making a burgeoning fascist movement more appealing. This is part of the core message of nascent fascist movements: that the government is causing a societal decline, which cannot be fixed by democracy (Paxton, 1998). The various means of misinformation, disinformation, double-

speak and projection, captured in Figure 81: *DON'T LET FASCISM COME BACK IN FASHION*, serve a fundamental objective of obtaining power through political gain, whereby the rapid reshaping of society in the protest's image is established in a new social order, enforced through the tools of political power, in the manner of revolution. The large variety of messaging at the Wellington Protest can be viewed as the culmination of previous market testing of political messaging that works both within its own group and could appeal to a wider audience. Both Hitler and Mussolini pivoted radically from their initial policies and demographics. Hitler turned to rural areas devastated economically and Mussolini pivoted to being anti-Union (Paxton, 1998). This pivoting in target and messaging is intended to create the split between the *elites* and the *real people* (Wodak, 2017) and is the basis of populist sentiment that all fascist movements are built on. We saw this specifically at the Wellington Protest, with many messages advocating unity in order to create a mass protest bloc. Figure 83: *WE THE PEOPLE NEED TO UNITE NEIGHBOURS COMMUNITIES GOOD FOLK STAND: SPEAK* and Figure 83 *UNITED WE STAND DIVIDED WE FALL* are good examples of this. This uniting language of 'we the people' is cast up against the most conspiratorial framing of the political and media estates, as seen in Figure 84: *PLEASE HELP US STOP JEW CINDA* and Figure 57: *NZ MEDIA PART OF GENOCIDAL MURDER*, forming a dichotomy where antisemitism and accusations of genocide via media broadcast become the moral and justified position of the *true people*. This is the power of divorcing truth from validity, basing validity in feeling, and the manifestation of online echo chambers into real-life phenomena. In doing so, this divorce allows the perpetual self-state of agitation and imperilment to become violent (Marcks & Pawelz, 2022), where memes and signs advocating freedom and liberty are subsumed by those advocating the hanging of political enemies (Askanius & Keller, 2021) in the discourse of the protest. Getting to this point requires understanding how fascism communicates not only to the outside world, but in the self-

reflective, clout chasing online sphere of gigantic conspiratorial discourses (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023). It also behoves us to understand how this is the end result of a feedback loop that started years earlier, cycling through rhetoric until it spilled out back into real-world convoys, Parliament grounds occupations, and violence.

Yet, despite the hyper focus on the Wellington Protest as a means of reshaping New Zealand's politics and societal structure specifically, both the messaging and the method was far from unique. In fact, it bore such close resemblance to other anti-government protests of the Covid-era that they appear functionally identical in both language and target. The nature of online, truly transnational Telegram communities of tremendous reach and size starts to beg the question: Has fascism become franchised?

Chapter Three: Transnational Fascism

The introduction of the internet, and particularly social media, into the public sphere has become the harbinger for a subtle yet fundamental way in which people engage political issues. The internet has not only allowed for the expansion of any individual's political knowledge, with its democratised access to news and events, but the centralisation of issues that people care about, with social media algorithms promoting the most *engaging* content into people's feeds, creating a new and personalised method of conglomerating like-minded individuals that transcends even borders. This incredible access to information, however, has the flipside of exposing anyone to mis/disinformation, the ability of nefarious actors to coordinate globally, and has allowed the concept of fascism to become transnational.

This chapter deals with the interconnected and global nature of contemporary fascist movements, where connections are made over shared ideals rather than shared borders, and the algorithmic pool of social media silos opens the door for a new franchised model of fascism to emerge. Placing the Wellington Protest against international events of the same ilk reveals such commonality in language, technique, and topic, that I argue it is best understood as the most recent franchisee of fascism, where the customers are the protestors and the product emerges as consistent around the globe.

Origins of Mistruths

Many of the signs present during the Wellington Protest were neither mis nor disinformation. Rather, they were intended to sow doubt, make the reader think, or otherwise contend the general narratives surrounding covid-19, vaccine efficacy, and the impact of lockdowns. The abovementioned emotional component of the signs at the Wellington Protest – the validity in feeling – allows the communication of messages to be presented always with the protest in the position of the moral right. This opens the door for the transposition of any suitable conspiracy, narrative, or threat to be coopted by those at the Wellington Protest as if

they themselves were the genesis for these messages via a function of their earnestness. This reflects recent scholarship on the online hive-mind nature of current fascist thought. Hobbs (2020) refers to it as the personalisation of propaganda, where populist rhetoric techniques combine with like-minded social media groups to provide a sense of fear. This mobilises fascist politics in a manner where the propaganda of their *own* media consumption (Wojczewski, 2020) becomes internalised as a threat for themselves and repurposed for whichever political climate is relevant in their country.

We can see this specifically regarding the Wellington Protest, where many of the New Zealand-specific narratives of the Convoy/Occupation can be traced back to the Ottawa Trucker's Convoy (Spray & Samaniego, 2023). We can also trace this, more broadly, to United States-based conspiracy theories and narratives that are either co-opted by movements globally or tweaked to be relevant in each country they reach, such as those in Berlin (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023). We can delineate the origin and effort of adaptation through a stark comparison, which I mentioned earlier in this thesis, involving a parked car at the protest photographed on 19 February being covered in bumper stickers by (presumably) the owner. I found 37 separate messages on the various bumper stickers, making it one of the richest sources of primary data I gathered. The most interesting aspect of the car is the clear demarcation between two collections of bumper stickers, half in white, half yellow. The ones in white were clearly of New Zealand origin, containing references to local politicians, as did Figure 85: *MAGA MAKE ARDERN GO AWAY*, used Te Reo Māori frequently as seen in Figure 86: *TU KOTAHI TATOOU STAND AS ONE*. These must have been rapidly manufactured and delivered to the protest, as they referenced slogans that emerged *during* the course of the occupation, such as speaker of the House Trevor Mallard turning on the Parliament lawn sprinklers, and playing songs like Baby Shark on repeat, as illustrated by Figure 87: *DUCK OFF MALLARD*. These bumper stickers tended to proclaim messages of

unity, personal freedoms, and collective kiwi identity in a language that would be familiar to a New Zealand audience. They also track closely with the language of many of the signs present during the earlier, convoy stages of the protest.

In contrast, the yellow bumper stickers had no references specific to New Zealand, let alone the Wellington Protest. The nature of the messaging is almost entirely what I coded as ‘fear-inducing.’ It was conspiratorial in nature, with language designed to sound frightening, as demonstrated by Figure 88: *BREAKING NEWS! BREATHING FRESH AIR IS NOT GOING TO KILL YOU (BUT THE EXPERIMENTAL VACCINE MIGHT)*, and presenting strong imagery of death, such as the grim reaper seen in Figure 89: *GET YOUR CLOTSHOT* and corpses with identification tags saying *I got my CLOT SHOT!* (see Figure 90). There is nothing local about any of these messages. The statements are broad and could be seen anywhere globally in an environment where anti-vax messaging is being spread. We can, however, identify the origins of the messaging through one singular bumper sticker, which seems to depict (at the time) Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr Anthony Fauci. Fauci played the equivalent role of being the public face of the government Covid response in the United States as Dr Ashley Bloomfield did here in New Zealand. Here on this bumper sticker identified as Figure 91, Fauci is captioned *DR EVIL*, has Devil horns, the catholic symbol of the Triple Candelabra, and what appears to be a Devil’s tail coming back over his shoulder. The image is quite striking in its level of religious imagery, especially given that Fauci himself had been clear that, although raised as a Catholic, he was no longer practicing as of 2003. Given New Zealand’s relative lack of consideration toward public displays of religiosity (Pratt, 2016), as well as what surely must be low public knowledge of the intricacies of United States public health policy, we could infer that the most likely origin for this bumper sticker, and thus the collection of all the yellow stickers, was the United States. It is not possible to be establish whether this was

directly ordered online or the bumper stickers were printed separately. However, since the yellow bumper stickers are at the bottom of the vehicle all around the outside, and slightly covered by the white (New Zealand-centric) stickers, it is most likely that the yellow stickers were present at the protest first.

This is important because it helps establish a timeline showing when these messages arrived into the Convoy/Occupation's lexicon. The yellow bumper stickers, complete with Nazi allusions in Figure 92: *HEALTH PASSPORT PLEASE*, catastrophising language expressed in Figure 62: *THE ONLY REASON THEY CAN COME FOR YOUR CHILD IS BECAUSE YOU SUBMITTED FIRST*, and deliberate disinformation in Figure 93 *CHILDREN ARE FIFTY TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE FROM THE VACCINE THAN FROM COVID-19*, can be traced *earlier* than the New Zealand, white, bumper stickers that promoted unity. These had subtly different messages around personal freedoms, with the yellow stickers taking a United States-centric, libertarian message of stoking fears of tyrannical government taking those freedoms away (Chong et al., 2024). The fact that these bumper stickers seemed to appear first means that at least a portion of the messaging was imported directly from overseas and transplanted into the Wellington Convoy/Occupation, with the intensity of these messages being noticeably higher than the other, more kiwi style of messages, as seen in Figure 94: *CHOICE BRO*, and possibly influencing some of the messaging on signs later on in the protest.

The Voices for Freedom signs are another distinctive collective of messaging of New Zealand origin. Easily distinguished by their blue background and cool-colour scheme, these pre-printed signs often showed up in groups right from the first day of the convoy. Although they contain many New Zealand-focused messages, including Figure 69: *ONE MILLION KIWIS ARE NOT JABBED*, the overall tone of the signs are punchy, political, and have more in common with the language of the overseas origin of the yellow bumper stickers than the

kiwiana of the later, white bumper stickers. Signs such as Figure 95: *PAPERS PLEASE! VACCINE PASSPORT* and Figure 96: *IS THIS THE FUTURE YOU WANT FOR YOUR KIDS?* are almost identical to those imported messages that are not grounded in locality, indicating that wherever these messages were coming from, those in VFF believed that the New Zealand situation is directly translatable for United States-centric messaging.

Other signs however are *almost* identical, with the messaging simply translated to a New Zealand audience. Consider Figure 97: *CLOT SHOT YEAH NAH!* and Figure 98: *PROTECT YOUR WHĀNAU SAY NO TO THE VAX* sub in kiwi colloquialisms and the commonly used Te Reo of ‘whānau’ in order to pivot the message to a kiwi audience (Grant, 2012). Figure 99: *WE STAND WITH WELLINGTON!* was reused from an older sign, which I suspect was Ottawa, with Wellington taped over the top of whatever the original city was. Overall, the Voices for Freedom signs were less conspiratorial, less wordy, and more *crafted* than nearly all the other groupings of signs that I coded over the course of the protest. Because of their mass-produced nature and already established presence in New Zealand as the more ‘moderate’ of the anti-vaccine groups (Clark, 2022), VFF was able to set a narrative from day one. They clearly valued the sign as a political tool to get their messaging and branding out into the wider public sphere. Given that Voices For Freedom have gone on to be associated with flyers, establishing a radio station, and a tv show, we can infer that they have a group of supporters who either regularly donate money or wealthy benefactors that are able to keep the group of three women in charge as a full-time political job. This level of support is possibly how they were able to organise the entire protest so quickly (Hannah et al., 2022), with the mass-production of the signs meaning that any who showed up were quickly able to shape the perception of the protest in VFF’s image. This helped set the tone right from the first day of the convoy, where cars waving VFF signs met roadside supporters holding signs from the same origin, such as Figure 95: *PAPERS PLEASE! VACCINE PASSPORT*.

This level of sign printing, logistical, and messaging coordination raises questions around the issues of astroturfing and the *origin* of these messages. Whomever was writing the messages for these signs clearly had a strong awareness of messaging at United States anti-lockdown protests (Fominaya, 2024), the Ottawa protests from only a few weeks prior (Gillies et al., 2023), and also the more specific kiwi issues that had been raised by anti-lockdown protestors, as illustrated by Figure 100: *JACINDA IS OUT OF CONTROL!* Clark (2022) has raised concerns about where the funding for VFF comes from, but I have not seen any security scholars writing on the protest raise the issue of a political movement that is being effectively coordinated, with goals to become established in local and national government, emerging so quickly with mature, overseas sourced messaging in a way identical to overseas protests from years prior (Bratich, 2022). This is a critical, if not essential, dimension not only of the Wellington Protest in isolation, but the larger political movement in New Zealand of which it is a part. By missing these overseas connections, security scholars cannot fully understand this political movement that deliberately fractures its messaging outside of the Telegram sphere. Furthermore, security practitioners lose early warning signs of the movement that engaged in the franchising of strategies and messaging that already had disruptive and violent consequences from years earlier (Pietrucci, 2023).

Digital Fascism

Overseas scholars have worked on this adoption of fascism into an online space, finding that those originally branded as ‘alt-right’ in particular have adapted quickly to utilise the internet in the most efficient ways possible to build a following (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019). Thus, social media has allowed the creation of emergent online fascisms, more culturally similar to others in the group, rather than other social groups, creating transnational conspiratorial communities within echo-chambers online. Del Vicario et al. (2016) describe homogeneity within these communities as drivers of the spread of information, comparing the

more homogenous conspiracy communities as more efficient at spreading fake news than the more heterogenous science communities were at disseminating scientific news. For fascist conspiracy specifically, DeVerna et al. (2024) found that superspreaders of various misinformation are overwhelmingly right-wing, with up to 90% of misinformation online being spread by far-right communities.

For the Wellington Protest specifically, itself a reflection of online communities, additional social dynamics come into play with the prevalence of MAGA support at the protest, as seen in Figure 101: *TRUMP MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!* Martel et al. (2024) found that those specifically allied to Donald Trump – who Paxton declared fitting his own description of a fascist post-6 January (Paxton, 2021) – tend to view those on the left as existential threats, and supported violent authoritarian action against them. This had no analogue for those aligned with Biden. Crucially for the establishment of a contemporary online fascism, sense of national identity (in this case with the United States) was a moderating factor on the view of the left as existential threats, as well as endorsement of authoritarian measures against them. Thus, we have a logical chain for a new fascism: the far-right capitalising on social media's reach and spread to people with sympathetic worldviews, creating homogenous communities that are hyper efficient in spreading misinformation online to further political goals, and largely all support Donald Trump in place of their own political leaders. Martel et al. (2024) also found the highest risk group for advocating authoritarian measures against their political opponents were Trump supporters with low sense of fusion with national identity. This conglomeration of factors can help to explain how MAGA rhetoric was found in Wellington and adapted to the New Zealand situation, as demonstrated by Figure 102: *Let's Go Brandern*. Figure 47: *JABCINDA NUREMBURG CODE IS GOING TO GET YOU!* is one example of many in a sea of violent threats against the political left.

We can test these theories of new fascisms being more tied to emergent online identities than geographically bound nationalisms. According to those in charge, the Wellington Protest had the aim of changing the legislation on the vaccine mandate (Skegg et al., 2022). However, changing out Te Reo for their English equivalent leads many of the signs to have very non-localised, non-specific aims and goals, as shown in Figure 103: *I AM NOT YOUR EXPERIMENT*. If there was a conspiracy/anti-vax ideology created during the covid era, we should expect to see talking points that emerge from online, mixed nationality communities that are dominated by the United States culturally due to its size and influence on social media discourse. In terms of evidence, signs such as Figure 104: *UNVAXXED LIVES MATTER* provide a rich context. To understand this sign, one must be aware of the Black Lives Matter movement that occurred mid-2020 in the United States after the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derick Chauvin (Ellison, 2021). The name of the movement became a rallying cry and a catch-all term for the significant social unrest that the protesting caused. Like many other signs at the Wellington Protest, this sign co-opts a well-known progressive movement, and replaces the aggrieved actor with members of their own group of ‘unvaxxed.’ The critical point here is that, whilst New Zealand had significant media coverage and protest in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement (Barber & Naepi, 2020), this was very specifically a United States cultural issue that had been used as an issue of social divide, particularly by inflammatory media entertainment and social networking conspiracy groups in the United States (Bolsover, 2020). This sign does double duty as insight. It shows that at least some of those present defined themselves by their unvaccinated status as a collective identity and that they were comparing their issues with United States socio-culture, politics, and the murder of African Americans by Police. The deep contextual understanding of this sign is reinforced by the surface level and obvious, but no less important, fact that there was a prevalence of Trump and United States flags, MAGA hats,

Qanon merchandise and other open associations with the American Right-wing at the Wellington Protest. This further indicates that even here in New Zealand there is little discrepancy between the imagery chosen as the face of new fascism as anywhere else in at least North America, leading to the creation of signs such as Figure 105: *MAGA MAKE ARDERN GO AWAY*.

Overseas Analysis on Anti-Lockdown Groups

Overseas scholars, however, had been grappling with these issues since 2020 (Alcalde, 2020; Bratich, 2022; Russell, 2023; Vieten, 2020), with Callison and Slobodian (2021), coining the term ‘diagonalism’ to describe the groups of people protesting their country’s respective lockdown policies. Callison and Slobodian point to communication technology (social media) being the factor in enabling this movement to conglomerate, while pinpointing characteristics of those protests, mostly in Germany, as rooted in cynicism of elites, traditional political power, and valuing individual freedoms. Diagonalism posits that these movements, with their conspiratorial thinking, fear of banks, pharmaceutical companies, and media are at *risk* of right-wing radicalisation, rather than being right-wing as an essentialist part of their nature. The manner in which they describe the protests messaging in Germany is eerily similar to the Wellington Protest, with media and state working together, as signalled in Figure 60: *MEDIA IS GOVT CONTROLLED SUSTAINED PROPOGANDA*. and doing so to hide the truth, as alluded to in Figure 106: *"Your single source of truth". Yeah right*. Figure 107: *FEAR IS THE REAL VIRUS* suggested the media and state together create fear while others, including Figure 108: *WHAT IF THE GOVERNMENT WAS LYING?? WAKE UP NEW ZEALAND* hint at some kind of collusion to deceive the general population. The German analogue group to Voices For Freedom, ‘*Querdenken*,’ shares many similarities to those present at the Wellington Protest, including their use of Telegram, which is an especially under-discussed aspect of all these protests. Springing up as an unrestricted hybrid

of WhatsApp/Discord, Telegram surged in popularity among anti-lockdown groups globally. Its largest channels (as of 2021) reached two-hundred thousand members, with *all* of the largest channels dedicated entirely to conspiracies, culture war issues, and alt-right US media clips captioned into various languages for the purposes of spreading worldwide (Callison & Slobodian, 2021). With the major Germany-specific Telegram channels being mostly links to alternative media, there is no reason we should not have expected the New Zealand case to be any different, particularly with the years of lead-time between European protest and the movements that finally erupted here.

This is especially true considering how well-known it was that Voices For Freedom was using Telegram to organise the protest from the start (Hannah et al., 2022). Despite the fact the channel was monitored – and VFF surely knew this was the case – there seems to be fundamental misunderstandings of what the average Telegram use looked like. Most channels relentlessly circulated mis/disinformation, with *each* channel sending messages per day reaching up into the hundreds (Callison & Slobodian, 2021). The analogues do not stop there. The German protest also had an attempted storming of Parliament and was comprised of a mix of right wing grifters, left-wing freedom activists, and general conspiracy theorists (Callison & Slobodian, 2021). If there was surprise from at least the New Zealand Police as to how quickly the Wellington Convoy/Occupation was able to organise, and how many people they were able to gather to their cause, as indicated by the IPCA report (Dudding & Hercock, 2024), it likely stemmed from a misunderstanding as to how mature these transnational communities had become. Despite not dramatically raring their head in New Zealand up until this point, the '*diagonalists*' of Telegram based locally had already gone through growing pains-by-proxy, sharing in the triumphs, tribulations, and misinformation of their communities online for years by this point, making the Wellington Convoy/Occupation less of a collective groundswell and more of a coming out party.

Diagonalism, Fascism

I am using Callison and Slobodian (2021) as an exemplar and comparison for the Wellington Protest not only due to their detailed analysis of Berlin's extremely similar protest, but also because of the behaviours they describe as '*diagonalism*.' None of them are incompatible with what other scholars say we should expect a modern-day fascism to be (Alcalde, 2020; el-Ojeili, 2019; Richards, 2022; Russell, 2022). I argue the concept of diagonalism is simply a repackaging of early-stage fascist movements in a manner that is better worded to be accepted and acted on by politicians and government officials. If diagonalism can be summed up as the behaviour, fuelled by conspiracy, that leads to groups being pulled toward right-wing ideology, then functionally it is no different to early-stage fascism as described by Paxton (1998), Zehring and Domahidi (2023), and Griffin (2023). This discrepancy of nomenclature likely stems from a conflation in the general public of fascist rule and fascism. The former is what is etched in the public consciousness, the latter is the broader political movement. I doubt that Callison and Slobodian are making this mistake themselves. Rather, I believe they (probably correctly) identify that this is a political issue that will not be touched in the political sphere due to Fascism's nature as the F-word of politics (Greenberg, 2021).

The use of conspiracy by the post-Trump transnational right-wing to motivate violence has been established by overseas scholars (Rousis et al., 2022), with others studying the increasingly radical nature and prevalence of conspiracy within Telegram groups over the same period as Callison and Slobodian (Schulze et al., 2022). Wider social media, too, has been pinpointed as offering productive ground for the spread of 'digital fascism', a warning that came over two years before the events of Wellington (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019). There are other scholars, therefore, describing the same behaviours of 'diagonalism' as fascism.

‘Diagonalism’ is loose in its ideology and more anti-government than a movement looking for a strong leader. Neither of these are incongruous with fascism as the goal of national rebirth in fascism *starts* with being anti-government, until the movement can be convinced that the ruling power can be remade in its image. Fascist movements too are known to draw in a wide range of views and ideas, being originally an amalgam of conspiracy (Giroux, 2022) where the common enemy of the established government and institutions forms the binding glue – an aspect mentioned in Callison and Slobodian (2021). The susceptibility of the ‘diagonalists’ to arc toward the far-right is no different to fascisms past, with the most infamous fascistic attempts at rule always requiring an alliance with the right-wing party of the time (Paxton, 1998). So too, do Callison and Slobodian (2021) describe the tendency of the diagonalists to create “start-up parties” (p. 16), where Germany and the United Kingdom saw a raft of populist parties pivoting to conspiracist anti-vax/anti-government issues, as well as numerous additional parties which sprung up and rapidly gained support. Here in New Zealand, we also saw in the wake of the Wellington Protest a raft of conspiracy parties emerge for the 2023 General Election (Marques et al., 2022) attempting to vie for political power and achieve political entrenchment, which is Paxton’s second stage of Fascism (Paxton, 1998).

The reason I have laboured on this point is because it is clear that Callison and Slobodian (2021) identified many key aspects of the movement that the Wellington Protest emerged from. Most fascinatingly, they described a carnival mirror reflection of the Convoy and Occupation a full year ahead, on a separate continent, yet one organised on the same Telegram group chat. So, whilst their research is highly relevant but underdiscussed in the New Zealand context, it must be clarified that – in line with other international scholars and the seminal work of Paxton (1998) – the movement they describe is *fascism*, and thus the Wellington Protest too must be described in the same terms.

Market-Tested Victimhood

The perpetual victim, which was one of the most prominent framings of the Wellington Protest messaging, is underscored by these transnational links. Early analysis of fascist language took a Freudian psychoanalytic approach. It highlighted the role that fascist propaganda played in creating a narcissism in those who were part of fascist movements, eventually becoming strong enough that self-reflection became too painful to contemplate (Adorno, 1951). More recent works, such as Stanley (2018) and Paxton (1998), hone in on the consequences of perceiving the world through a state of perpetual victimhood. It is important to keep in mind the recent temporal aspects of the Wellington Protest if we are attempting to draw transnational linkages. Given the large presence of the social network messaging in the lives of these transnational fascist communities (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023), Wellington's messages were *years* in the making and highly developed to ensure they always presented with victimhood as their justification.

New Ways of Looking at the World and Diagnosing its Ills

Vaccine hesitancy had long been an issue in the medical field (Siddiqui et al., 2013), but the emergence of a COVID-19 vaccine was always likely to bring the issue to the fore through the sheer magnitude of the societal impacts of covid and the subsequent vaccination programme (Beleche, 2021). Structural fascism scholars, such as Paxton (1998), ask us to examine if the economic or constitutional system is in a state of blockage when looking for risk factors that foment the first stages of fascisms. Coming at the end of a series of politically, socially, and economically harmful lockdowns (Every-Palmer et al., 2020), the interconnected protestors globally saw themselves as the victims and as by-products of a tyrannical new-world-order of governments that had forced populations to become unwitting experiments in some form of medical cruelty, as indicated in Figure 40: *PLEASE DONT ALLOW THEM TO POISON ♥ YOUR ♥ TAMARIKI. PROTECT THEM.*

There was a trend where many of the most victim-positioned signs, which I originally described as ‘appeal to emotion’, are held by and possibly written by children who were present (it is unclear who truly wrote these, however). Figure 41: *My MuM can't take me to my favourite camp spot, the cinema, the library (I love reading), my sports, the swimming pools. I MiSS Seeing people. It's Not Fair. NZ it's time for change!!!* positions the protest group as victims and attempt to elicit New Zealanders to empathise with their protest. Figure 42: *POLICE COMPLICIT WITH ♥ MURDER ♥ Please protect my friends* was held by a very young child, but must have been written by an adult, and can best be understood as a method to invoke a stronger emotional reaction by placing highly inflammatory language into the hands of a child. Fascism had traditionally placed the child as the victim, requiring both cherishing and protecting (Ferris, 2017), and the manner in which children were used in the Wellington Protest echoes closely the histories of fascists globally to propagandise and indoctrinate the youngest members of their societies (Eastwood, 2011; Ziemer, 1943)

Fascist’s Guide to Reimagining Nationalism

Figure 109: *LEST WE FORGET THEY FOUGHT FOR OUR FREEDOM* was one of the signs that stood out during my original encounter with the convoy. It was a printed, rather than hand-written, sign and distributed by convoy organisers, Voices for Freedom. Complete with poppy, this sign was waved enthusiastically in the middle of the Napier/Taupō roundabout. The printed nature of it, and the way it illuminated how the protest was attempting to position itself historically, makes it one of the most important signs to analyse when trying to understand the wider rhetoric of reimagined, nationalistic victimhood that permeated the convoy and occupation. Taking Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), which establishes that nations are shared, imagined linkages via people who shall never meet, as applied to a franchised model of fascism, we can see that these imagined linkages are now not only transnational, but even *more* imagined. In this updated understanding, the

nationalism of signs referring to the ANZACs are not only attempting to tap into a sense of the viewer's national unity, but are a piece of the rhetorical puzzle that can be subbed in and out to each country depending on its relevance. Thus, the trope of ANZAC's of Aotearoa/Australia plays the role equivalent to the founding fathers in the United States, or war veterans in Europe, or any other piece of nationalistic imagery. What matters for franchised fascism is not the specifics of the nationalism, but simply that it is used as a politicised tool of rhetoric.

There is further elaboration of the occupation's argument in other signs. Figure 110: *GRANDPA FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM FROM DICTATORS LIKE JACINDA* introduces the dictator term to this context, ties Jacinda to it, and completes the ANZAC analogy from their perspective. Like soldiers in WWI/WWII, they are making a grand and noble journey to fight against the big bad of their era; namely, authoritarian dictators. This sort of self-framing ties together the dominant messaging of the convoy era of the protest, as seen in Figure 21: *FREEDOM*. The vast majority of explicit messaging from the protest was less about questioning the mandate, or even the vaccine, though these messages were certainly present. Instead, there was a much broader self-narrative of fighting for freedom. A highly prominent car near the front of the convoy illustrates this clearly. Emblazoned with a painted New Zealand flag, it had no reference to the mandate or vaccines at all. Instead it had Figure 1: *FREEDOM FIGHTER* across the front, a historically and contextually dense phrase often adopted by liberation groups in the Middle East and Africa (Haner, 2017) and frequently the counter-perspective to the framing of 'terrorist' (Kleinot, 2019). This shows a cohesive message of liberation was prominently and proudly displayed from the earliest days of the protest because a lead car was adorned with the nationalist symbol of the flag, fighting for freedom, and establishing the hero/victim dynamic from the very first day.

We can trace the cohesiveness of this fanning of self-heroism by connecting *very specific language* to other anti-lockdown/anti-vaccine/anti-government protests in the covid era. Italian far-right anti-vaccine pass protestors in 2021 stormed the headquarters of the country's largest Union, chanting 'we are the people' and 'freedom, freedom!', shutting down Rome overnight and also causing injuries to police when attacking a local hospital (Pietrucci, 2023). This (translated) language is remarkably similar to some of the most prevalent messaging of the Wellington Protest, seen in Figure 21: *FREEDOM* and Figure 111: *WE THE PEOPLE DO NOT! CONSENT*. Once again, the mechanism of explanation for these transnational narratives is most likely Telegram, with Curley et al. (2022) finding the presence of far-right narratives in Ireland to be large but clustered, identifying the main nodes of discourse on Telegram at the time as freedom, protecting children, 'Anti-tyranny', 'the resistance', and 'information' channels that were used to spread mis and disinformation. Interestingly, these Telegram channels were showing up in Ireland as early as April 2020, meaning that these narratives, many of which ended up appearing directly on signs at the Wellington Protest, had been circulating online for nearly two years, and already appeared word-for-word in Italian protests. This seems to have been missed in New Zealand by both the relevant scholars and security practitioners. I believe a factor in the lack of attention on these factors may simply be that the rate of technological change has outstripped establishment understandings of movements, such as fascism and nationalism. Anderson (1983) describes print capitalism as a major component of the rise of nationalism becoming possible because it enable the spread of propaganda effectively across an entire nation. Suddenly, with social media, another tectonic shift has occurred that allows these imagined communities to become a seeming oxymoron of transnational nationalisms: the franchised fascism. Now, transnational communities are able to create hyper coordinated, ideologically congruent content that is franchised to create new, real world, movements in whichever

country it appears in. Just as global chains provide a consistent product no matter where in the world one is whilst still catering to local tastes and history, so too is franchised fascism able to create cohesive, yet adaptable rhetoric that moulds to each nation it is brought to in order to craft the most tantalising message to its potential customers.

Worryingly for possible future developments, Weigand et al. (2022) studied the how the language of anti-lockdown German Telegram groups were getting more radicalised, finding that by 2022 almost all the anti-lockdown Telegram channels used to organise protests in Germany, which were also used to organise the Wellington Protests, were (unlike Ireland) fully co-opted by the far right, and almost entirely conspiratorial. This suggests that whether a country's anti-lockdown groups become conspiratorial may be transnationally determined via engagement in gigantic Telegram groups, but the level of far-right fascist involvement could be moderated via local national politics, something that could be investigated in future research.

The Enemy is Both Strong and Weak

There is an interesting dynamic of self-positioning of power in the Wellington Protest, whereby they place themselves, simultaneously, as analogous to history's greatest heroes and its most famous victims. The ANZAC-hero message comes up across the convoy and occupation, as shown in Figure 112: *THIS IS OUR HOUR THIS IS OUR GALLIPOLI DIG IN NEW ZEALAND*, often alongside more victim-centric positioning such as Figure 113: *She forced you too, so please stand with us not against us*. In this case, the messaging of the protest is that 'I am both tragic victim and conquering hero'. We can see this as an extension of the victim dynamic used in the anti-lockdown protests in Rome, where violence against political opponents, healthcare workers, and Police was simultaneously justified through their position as perpetual victims and celebrated online on their telegram in-group communities (Pietrucci, 2023).

This is the mirror image of the communication technique often associated with fascists: ‘the enemy is both strong and weak’ (Eco, 1995). Ardern is, by far, the most common subject of this category of messaging. There are numerous references comparing Ardern to history’s most infamous dictators, fascists, and authoritarians, as seen in Figure 114:

COMRADE ARDERN, Figure 54: *Adolf Ardern*, Figure 8: *SIEG HEIL ARDERN OUR MIGHTY FUHRER Man you're good-Setting us against eachother;- Right from the playbook!* and Figure 53: *STALINDA LIEBOUR FUCK OFF*. This is unsurprising when we consider that the reason for the protest group’s existence is their strong anti-government sentiment, something that, especially with Ardern’s prominence in Covid-19 safety messaging, is bound to be focused on the head of government and was compounded by the misogyny evidenced in anti-vaccine groups post-covid (White, 2024). This tracks closely with other overseas experiences of similar protests where those who took the pandemic seriously were accused of being dictatorial, with Angela Merkel being accused of using covid as an excuse to stage a coup (Pleyers, 2020). Meanwhile male, populist/fascist leaders, such as Trump and Bolsonaro, actively encouraged their populace to rail against public health measures (Pleyers, 2020).

Yet, contemporaneous and in contrast to the signs associating Ardern with history’s most infamous dictators who committed crimes against humanity, there were many misogynistic, belittling, and frequently antisemitic signs describing Ardern as ‘too weak’ in various ways and unfit for duty as Prime Minister, as seen in Figure 115: *For Sale One Prime Minister of N.Z - Has Some delusions, and - Narcistic Qualities. Unsure - of addiction or Gender - or Covid Vaxine status. - As is where is. \$800.00 - Will Swap for Life size Blowup Doll*. Dehumanising, misogynistic language such as this is representative of the fascist need for a male authority figure, an aspect that is exacerbated when a far-right movement is able to protest against a left-leaning government (Paxton, 1998). Misogyny, too, plays a role here,

with Ardern being unashamedly a woman – one of the first to have a child as Prime Minister – and the leader of the Labour Government makes her much more likely to be the target of vitriol and conspiracy (Tebaldi, 2021), an aspect that White (2024) ties to deliberate attempts of disinformation efforts to exacerbate misogyny. Ardern was also the target of antisemitic tropes (Lawrence et al., 2021), including those conflating her with a more general ‘new world order’ conspiracy, drawn images of her frequently done in a style that reflects offensive Jewish stereotypes, and those that said the quiet part out loud, as illustrated in Figure 84: *PLEASE HELP US STOP JEWINDA* and Figure 116: *JUCINDA YOU'RE FIRED!*

The positioning of the messaging around Ardern, as the invincible dictator/weak woman, creates the push and pull dichotomy to the protest’s own image of heroism/victim. The protest movement is simultaneously the hero, sweeping into Parliament grounds with the legitimacy of the ANZAC’s behind them, ready to topple the mandates and get a meek, unfit Ardern out of power as Prime Minister. Yet, at the same time, it is the movement of the oppressed, with all the legitimacy of the victims of the worst oppressors in history behind them, standing at the very foot of parliament to rise up against a tyrannical, authoritarian leader. Both framings are interchangeable depending on purpose and, in both, the signs point to the convoy/occupiers being the heroes of their own story, in a way that can be traced back through real-world consequences for Rome in 2021, and the establishment of Telegram groups as early as April 2020.

Justifying Violence Through Disillusion

In my original data analysis, I coded signs demonstrating victimhood as some of the most emotional and rousing, reflecting the form of catharsis related to being heard, which many of those present felt after feeling ignored over their concerns surrounding vaccine mandates. This state of victimhood allows the self-justification of violence. The Wellington Protest was a swathe of messages that spanned all manner of political systems and beliefs, yet

nearly all shared one central mood: disillusion and anger directed at the Labour government.

Figure 117: *GOVERNMENT ARE THE VIRUS*, Figure 100: *JACINDA IS OUT OF CONTROL!*, and Figure 108: *WHAT IF THE GOVERNMENT WAS LYING?? WAKE UP NEW ZEALAND* are each emblematic of a raft of dozens of unique signs present.

However, many, if not most, of the signs being directed at Ardern crossed the line from outpourings of emotion to outright calls to violence and harm. I make a very clear distinction between signs with messages such as Figure 118: *GeT A Real JOB Bitch FUCK Jacinda! !* and Figure 119: *Jacinda you're a pussy Get out Here & own your Shit*, which can be interpreted as delivering messages of political intent – albeit angrily – demanding she step down and/or come to speak to the protestors respectively, as opposed to the outright calls to violence that frequently mentioned Ardern as facing the consequences of the Nuremburg trials, as indicated in Figure 47: *JABCINDA NUREMBURG CODE IS GOING TO GET YOU!* Many of these Nuremburg trial signs came decorated with either drawn on nooses or nooses made of ropes attached, making interpretation of their meaning clear. This how the perpetual state of victimhood, or the disillusion of democracy that Paxton speaks to – where a strong enough belief that democracy has failed their group justifies almost any action (Paxton, 1998) – creates a permissive space for calls to violence in a social movement.

The Nuremburg references are the other side of the coin to the wartime framing the ANZAC signs represent. This is potent rhetoric. If the protest is disillusioned with democracy, by placing their movement on war-footing the *rules* of democracy no longer apply. These accusations of dictatorship and threatened violence solidifies the protest's positioning as seeking redress outside democratic processes. Signs including images of the police, such as Figure 75: *I WAS JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS*, Figure 120: *Everything HITLER did was LEGAL*, and Figure 95: *PAPERS PLEASE! VACCINE PASSPORT* (Figure 95) are all direct references to the most infamous parts of Nazi Germany's treatment of its

Jewish, disabled, and queer populations. By placing themselves as the victims akin to some of infamous crimes in history, the protest casts off democracy as a tool of recourse, replacing it with a war footing and honing in on the leadership of the government, and those who they see as its enablers, for retribution.

Their intended means of retribution are clear. Consider Figure 72: *REMEMBER You are never too important to be hanged for TREASON!* and Figure 121: *NUREMBERG ARDERN. HIPKINS. BLOOMFIELD. TRIALS* and, complete with drawn-on noose Figure 57: *NZ MEDIA part of GENOCIDAL MURDER*. Even though we can trace the sentimental origins of this rhetoric to general distrust and disillusion with government and democracy generally (Russell, 2022), calls to violence such as these are the endpoint of using war-footing and catastrophised accusations of murder on a government. These calls are delivered with the same enthusiasm and zeal as any of the other signs and messages displayed at the protest, indicating a normalisation and comfort with this level of violence in rhetoric (Schulze et al., 2022). This normalisation would be in line with Curley et al. (2022) if we posit that the Wellington Protest, which was organised in and emerged from Telegram communities, held up signs that reflected the language and social dynamics in which they were used to online. Curley et al.'s (2022) language analysis of large, anti-lockdown Telegram groups that covered the time span of the Wellington Protest found that 'Nuremberg' terms were extremely prominent themes in their data analysis, being linked to 'replacement genocide' and 'global elite' themes in the Telegram communities. Importantly, whilst Curley et al. (2022) made it clear that, whilst the far-right groups were tolerated, they were not in charge of the Irish Telegram communities specifically as of May 2021. However, they did caution that the relationship between conspiracy and far-right groups in these communities was becoming more enmeshed, and that the telegram activity was only increasing. If we combine these findings with Zehring & Domahidi (2023), which found that both far-right and conspiracy

Telegram channels act as transnational distributors for Q-anon content, Covid conspiracies, and right-wing populism, we have a causal mechanism that can help explain some of the violent murder fantasy (Alcalde, 2020) images displayed prominently over the course of the Wellington Protest.

Perhaps this helps to explain the specifically religious attacks on Ardern too, likely stemming from the shared facets of ideology between fascism and conservative evangelicalism enmeshing together in these Telegram communities. In this case, they both are patriarchal, conservatively aligned in values, and have a factor of unquestioned worship of a figure promising societal rebirth (Crawford, 2023). Being the leader of the nation as an (at the time) un-married mother and prominent figure of the left globally, Ardern presented a strong challenge to certain worldviews, which made her a prime target of anti-feminist conspiracy more generally (Tebaldi, 2021; White, 2024). The Labour Government's significant focus on passing socially progressive legislation, such as legalising abortion, and holding the Marijuana referendum may have made those who held opposite values more predisposed to believing the conspiracy rhetoric we saw at the Wellington Protest, which posited she was the daughter of the literal Devil, as shown in Figure 33: *SATAN IS ARDERNS DADDY* – a figure frequently depicted in popular culture and history as a woman possessed to do the bidding of the devil (Reis, 1999).

One correlation we can say for certain is that *given* a sign was coded as highly conspiratorial, i.e. it contained numerous, frequently rambling references to many outlandish conspiracy theories, that sign was much more likely to touch on religious themes than a sign that was not conspiracy adjacent. We cannot say the reverse is true, however, because the commonalities between the rhetoric of conspiratorial religion and early stage fascisms (Eatwell, 2003), as well as the future religious nature of political parties that sprung from the occupation could offer some insight as to where the movement's most dedicated support and

enthusiasm may be coming from. In this sense, consider the significance of Figure 122: *ILLUMINATI Hive of Power Black Rock & Vanguard Control World Corporations NOW Control Most World Countries Five Eyes Nations All Controlled, Plus NZ Politicians All Puppets & 'MSM' All Captured. Judiciary Chamber of Commerce (UN) All captured. Trade Unions - All Captured, Elite Maori, All Captured. HALT & STOP the 'Loveless - Soulless - Godless' NEW WORLD ORDER.*

Missing Context of Enabling Victimhood

The effectiveness of the Wellington Protest's message of division lies on its fundamental truth that those who did not take the vaccine(s) *were* restricted from certain activities, albeit temporarily. Missing here, of course, is any details on the where, when, and *why* these restrictions were in place in the first place. Figure 73: *AT NO POINT IN HISTORY HAVE THE PEOPLE FORCING OTHERS INTO COMPLIANCE BEEN THE GOOD GUYS* shows the protest's attempted moral positioning, as Figure 1: *FREEDOM FIGHTER* shows them fighting for their rights to free movement against a tyrannical government. Stripped of all context, this is a powerful message regarding what seems like excessive government interference with what many consider to be the fundamental right to free movement (Juss, 2004).

However, context is, of course, everything. Figure 123: *To the people feeling inconvenienced by the REVOLUTION my family can't visit or attend libraries, theatres, cafes, birthing suites, funerals, museums, doc huts, pools, resthomes..* is a revealing passage that is likely a quite literal sign of the social bubble that many of these messages seemed to stem from (Jones-Jang & Chung, 2022; Weigand et al., 2022). The places listed in the sign are the locations where social distancing was difficult and, especially in the case of rest homes and birthing suites, where there are much more likely to be segments of the population either at risk of infection or with lowered immune systems that increase the severity of any infection

(Pijls et al., 2021). The very places listed *are* the rationale behind the vaccination program itself, with the science pointing to evidence that unvaccinated individuals are more likely to spread infection among at-risk communities (Jung et al., 2022).

This context is critical to understanding the issue of mandates that it must be stripped or flipped for the protest message to even make sense, let alone be effective. Viewed from the perspective of someone who approved of the vaccination efforts, Figure 124: *May we think of freedom not as the right to do as we please but the opportunity to do what is RIGHT ♥* puts the anti-vax/mandate section of the population squarely as the group of people who wish to do what they please, rather than doing what is right which, in this case, is vaccinating to offer additional protection to the immune compromised and elderly. A sign displayed right next to the previous one is also insightful. Consider the significance of Figure 41: *My MuM can't take me to my favourite camp spot, the cinema, the library (I love reading), my sports, the swimming pools. I MiSS Seeing people. It's Not Fair. NZ it's time for change!!!* Ostensibly written by a child, it is a reasonably cohesive political message about the impact that the restrictions on those who remained unvaccinated were having on children, which is a group that does not have a say either way in this argument. Again, however, it is stripped of context for the sake of advancing the political message of division. Whilst it is undoubtedly unfair to the child who is missing out on these activities, it completely absolves the role that the mother figure of the sign plays, placing the blame instead on the government for the child missing out. Although this is one of the most focused signs present in Wellington with regards to the specific impacts of vaccine mandates, there is mixed evidence for predicting the intensity of anti-lockdown protest via the intensity of lockdowns and public health protocols. Spann et al. (2020) analysed the relationship between the two and found protests were more likely if lockdowns and mandates were stricter, but moderated downward through general civic trust and financial support. These findings, perhaps, go some way to explaining

why specific anti-lockdown messaging was far less common than the transnationally pervasive anti-government movements at the time (Pleyers, 2020).

Throwing Mud

Taking a step back, it is not surprising, then, that a cohesive aspect of the messaging was one of accusations of division (with the implicit messaging that division *must* be bad), rather than any fundamental moral argument. Yet, for this argument to be effective, the vaccine's efficacy must be undercut too for the message to work. In this way, and unlike the strongly (and ironically) cohesive and repeated message of division, countering the vaccine itself was an attempted death by a thousand cuts. The vaccine was described as variously contaminated, as in Figure 125: *INVESTIGATE EVIDENCE OF VAX CONTAMINATION*, deadly according to Figure 126: *The Vaccine KILLED My Sister 3 Blood Clots In Her Lungs & 1 In Her Aorta*, and untested in Figure 127: *BREAKING NEWS! BREATHING FRESH AIR IS NOT GOING TO KILL YOU (BUT THE EXPERIMENTAL VACCINE MIGHT)*.

This component of messaging formed the protestors' attempt to explain the morality of the *why* they choose not to take the vaccine, amounting to a general argument that the vaccine was variously untested, unsafe, and unnecessary because Covid-19 itself was not a big worry. Doing so attempts to transform the messaging around mandates from 'we don't want to' into 'we don't want to be because the vaccine is **dangerous**.' The messaging on vaccines were some of the most conspiratorial and generally non-fact based of the protest. The vast majority of the signs around the vaccine were of a derogatory nature, as illustrated by Figure 89: *GET YOUR CLOTSHOT*, whilst deliberately not going into specifics. Some of the most conspiratorial messages such as this were evidenced in the group of bumper stickers that I traced to United States-based messaging, perhaps suggesting that the conspiratorial nature of the Telegram groups used to organise the Wellington Protest (Curley et al., 2022) was having an influence on their messaging surrounding the vaccine, which had quickly

become an increasingly dominant theme of discussion and conspiracy in these groups by 2022 (Weigand et al., 2022)

Messages that attempted to offer specific evidence against the jab were mainly anecdotal evidence of alleged fatalities, usually of family members, referred to without name, or some form of statistic that was either unreferenced or had links to a known conspiracy website. It is worth pointing out, too, that even taking a sign such as Figure 128: *NATURAL IMMUNITY 99.6% EFFECTIVE!!* at face value implies that as New Zealand reached 100% cumulative infection rates over a long enough period of time, we could expect fatalities of around twenty thousand people given a population of around five million. This sign is one of the very few I could find in the whole protest that gave some sort of numerical argument for their anti-vaccine position.

The final component of the protest's argument concerned covid itself: namely, that it is not an illness severe enough to justify either a vaccine program, lockdown, or any form of mandate. To properly understand analyse the messaging of these signs however, we must recombine the fragments of wider context in order to gain comprehension. The protest took place during gathering restrictions in the wake of months of lockdowns due to the delta and omicron outbreaks, creating the conditions for a super spreader event, which is exactly what happened when reports of widespread illness matching Covid symptoms started coming out of the occupation on Parliament grounds (O'Brien & Huntington, 2022). To even undertake the protest in a logically self-consistent manner therefore, the messaging refuting the severity of covid must be targeted within the group itself, as indicated in Figure 129: *KEEP HUGGING IT'S HEALTHY*, otherwise protestors would be knowingly putting themselves at risk and lose what they perceived at their moral high ground as they created superspreader events through their protesting, which had already been noted in earlier overseas anti-lockdown protests (Lange & Monscheuer, 2022). Taking into account the gathering

restrictions at the time and these proven links between anti-lockdown and superspreading events, given that health risks to the general population unequivocally pose a form of security threat the leniency with which the Wellington Protest was treated should have come under the scope of analysis for security practitioners in order to determine that the *overall* security risk to the public was minimised. The manner in which the clearing of the last day resulted in violence and property damage *anyway* merits a more thorough comparison of best practice for Police in these situations, whereby the chosen path of containment led to sustained health risks to both protestors and the general public, and did not lead to a peaceful resolution of the occupation of Parliament grounds.

Concurrent with the impacts to health during the occupation phase, there was a fascinating aspect of denial in the signs regarding covid as the protest progressed and faced this reality, with messages such as Figure 107: *FEAR IS THE REAL VIRUS* and Figure 64: *YOU CANT CATCH A VIRUS* denying the very existence of Covid-19 itself. This escalated further when conspiracy messaging started to take hold of some protestors, culminating in the wearing of tinfoil hats by some members (Reeve, 2022) and blaming 5G towers for their illness rather than the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, as shown in Figure 130: *RADIATION TOWERS Stop the unlawful roll-out Stop frying our children to death*. The escalation of conspiracy thinking as reality starts to impact beliefs is a behavioural feature of those who are on a pathway of increasing conspiracy intensity (Schulze et al., 2022). It is exactly this rise in belief intensity, the mobilising aspect of conspiracy beliefs, this is inherent to the escalation of fascist movements (Trevor-Roper, 1968), with Mason (2021) providing numerous examples of a cohesive argument that fascism is *fundamentally built* on conspiracy. This incorporation of conspiracy thinking allows us to comprehend the broad thrust of messages present at the protest: that the government knowingly subjected the population of New Zealand to a vaccine that is deadly, according to Figure 16: *HEALTHY KIDS is NATURAL*

IMMUNITY RISKY VAX DEADLY!, and for the purposes of societal control and personal gain according to Figure 131: *TRYING TO FOLLOW THE SCIENCE... BUT IT KEEPS LEADING ME BACK TO THE MONEY!*, whilst justifying this vaccination program with a virus that is not harmful in Figure 132: *TRUTH FREEDOM THE GLOBAL PHARMACEUTICAL DECEPTION OF REV.18:23 IS HERE*. We can thus understand the conspiracies through their dual function. They provide messaging points and a form of impetus for the protest itself through the urgency of their accusations. They also, and more pertinently here, provide a form of unity for the protest, a sense of ‘we’re all in this together’ and shared understanding that allows the protest to bond on conspiracy belief as common ground, forming a real-world manifestation of the same kind of language and logic of the conspiratorial, global Telegram groups from which these messages and people emerged (Curley et al., 2022; Schulze et al., 2022; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023).

Case of the Transnational Leader

The authority of the natural fascist leader is enmeshed with the public perception on fascism (Paxton, 1998). Yet, it has been argued that the Wellington Protest was able to go so long, and was ultimately unsuccessful, because the opposite was true: no singular leader was present (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2023). This ties in with certain scholarly perspectives on contemporary fascism, such as Fielitz & Marcks (2019), who view the decentralised organisational aspect of modern fascist movements to be the single most differing aspect to foundational understandings of fascism. Whilst this is likely due to the ability of social media to organise and inspire without requiring physical presence, for Wellington specifically, with the numerous groups present, such as Voices for Freedom, Destiny Church, and Tinorangatiratanga activists, each coming with their own leadership and organising, the level of decentralisation may be a manifestation of the manner in which protest was brought together in only three weeks by Voices For Freedom, leaving little time for organic leadership

to emerge. This did not stop figures from trying to exert leadership however, with the IPCA report detailing the difficulty they faced in negotiating with the protest was not just that there was no overall leader, but that each group's leader was adamant that they spoke for the whole collective present (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2023).

We can understand this decentralisation as the transposition to the real world of this feature of nascent fascist movements in the post-social media age. The *natural leader* is no longer required to have a self-sustaining fascist movement (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019). Paxton (1998) extolls the nature of fascism's rapid evolutionary tendencies, and we can see that even Hitler and Mussolini were technologically dependant. They could not speak to gigantic crowds without a microphone, distribute propaganda without the printing press, or threaten violence without the personal firearm. Likewise, the Wellington Convoy/Occupation that took place in 2022 could not have coalesced and been organised so quickly without social media, in particular Telegram (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023). Thus, we should not expect the spread of the leader's message to look the same as 100 years ago. The technological limits of the 1930's created the conditions for charismatic leaders to speak to large crowds in a bid to win popular support, but for the Wellington Protest they had different incentives, including to create viral pieces of media that would not only be featured on traditional news outlets, but, and perhaps more importantly, be sharable to social media. In this manner, I believe that proper understanding of the leadership of contemporary fascist groups can be better understood by asking not 'who is saying these things', but rather 'who is this person saying these things to?'.

The Natural Chieftain: Trump

This warping of traditional incentives from holding protest signs to spread a message to that of looping narrative where talking points emerge from social media, are then transposed to signs, only then to be photographed and reposted back to the online sphere is,

perhaps, an explanatory variable as to the only overarching ‘leader’ prominent in the messaging: Donald Trump. It challenges our preconceptions to have a fascist leader not present at a protest, or even in the same country (Richards, 2022). Yet undoubtedly the only signs that showed support of a leadership figure that I could find were in support of Trump in a manner that suggests the transnational social media groups of the anti-vax/anti-government/fascist movements have centralised not only their talking points but also their leadership. There is, however, an alternative explanation to the decentralised theory. No obvious leader present is further proof that fascism is *more* centralised than ever, having become franchised as Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) have gone transnational.

Figure 101: *TRUMP MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN*, Figure 32: *TRUMP Q SENT US*, and Figure 133: *LET’S GO BRANDON* are all signs one would see at an American Trump rally or protest (Shahin, 2023), yet were present at an occupation ostensibly pertaining to a specific section of New Zealand law regarding vaccine mandates (O’Brien & Huntington, 2022). Common US rhetoric was co-opted to a New Zealand context too. Multiple versions of Figure 85: *MAGA MAKE ARDERN GO AWAY* and Figure 102: *Let’s Go Brandern* show that slogans and phrasings on signs were at least partially on display to an audience informed of American right-wing political talking points, memes and rhetoric, if not an outright American audience online.

This support of Trump is a vital component of understanding the messaging of the protest because Trump *is* a fascist (Wilkie, 2023) and leads a movement further along in the stages of Fascism than any counterparts in New Zealand (Paxton, 1998). Paxton himself, who had held off using the term for such a long period of time to describe Trump, changed his tune after 6 January, saying that it was a clear attempt at preventing the democratic transfer of power (Paxton, 2021). Subsequent hearings in the United States reached the same conclusion, with Trump now mired in many court cases for his election interference (Fausset, 2022) and

convicted of covering payments that may have influenced the 2016 General election (Snyder, 2024). There is a broader pattern of fascist rhetoric too because numerous rallies feature speeches on national rebirth, promise retribution to his enemies, use strongman image and iconography, and call for the co-option of the conservative movement as a body put to the task of committing violence and rebirth of the American nation as a Christo-fascist state (Fountain, 2024; Perry, 2023; Giroux, 2023).

We should find the presence of Trump support at the Wellington Protest unusual, weird, bothersome. This is the American leader of fascism (Paxton, 2021) who is showing up at the other end of the world, and yet the presence of MAGA merch and gigantic Trump election flags seems to have been met with an odd indifference. Since his emergence as the Presidential nominee in 2016, support of Trump has become a shorthand *globally* for anti-political stances, chauvinistic identity politics, and increasingly fascist views enabled by global silos of propagandised information economies (Mudde, 2022; Parmar & Furse 2023; Thompson & Hawley, 2021). The MAGA imagery at the Wellington Protest should demand reflection, yet the fact it did not offers insight in of itself. The beliefs that Trump could not be the leader of the Wellington Protest and the lack of surprise at the presence of support for him are incongruent, where the expectation of MAGA presence also indicates a belief that Trump support is expected; so, why? Holding the two beliefs simultaneously is a form of cognitive dissonance (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019), where the internally held belief that a global fascist movement could not have reached the shores of New Zealand clashes with the real-world events of strong Trump support literally at the steps of political power in Aotearoa. Instead, mainstream political and media attempts to square the mental circle by framing the support of Trump as either not genuine, deliberately provocative, or a disconnected element of the protest that did not reflect the main views of those present during the Wellington Protest (Sapkota, 2022). I argue that better self-analysis of beliefs as to why one would not

want Trump to be a genuine and true presence of fascism at the Wellington Protest would lead to better reflection as to how *unusual* the presence of Trump – or any international figure like him – should be considered at a protest ostensibly about New Zealand health legislation.

I was struck by a speaker at the Otago Foreign Policy School in 2023, who said that when it comes to the new alt-right in the political sphere, ‘we should not do them the favour of calling them populist’. The label ‘populist’ for movements like MAGA and the German groups who organised their anti-lockdown protests (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023) is a label that they *would wish* to be called as it is a sanitised label that whitewashes their political rhetoric of destroying their opposition and ultimately crafting a society in their image through punishment of their enemies and eliminating democratic recourse. It is a fact that those present at Wellington were part of the same transnational community. Paxton (1998) says that fascism must be judged by its *actions*, and we have a collective of German, Italian, American, Canadian, British, and Australian movements that are displaying traits that we should not do the favour of calling populist (Pietrucci, 2023; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023). These people are part of a transnational community that is a manifestation of the lying world of conspiracy that fascism is built upon (Mason, 2021; Fielitz & Marcks, 2019). We had a Wellington protest that walked, talked and quacked like every other group because ultimately, they emerged from the same online fascist community (Curley et al., 2022): There were the same conspiracist talking points that feature in Figure 122: *ILLUMINATI Hive of Power Black Rock & Vanguard Control World Corporations NOW Control Most World Countries Five Eyes Nations All Controlled, Plus NZ Politicians All Puppets & 'MSM' All Captured. Judiciary Chamber of Commerce (UN) All captured. Trade Unions - All Captured, Elite Māori, All Captured. HALT & STOP the 'Loveless - Soulless - Godless' NEW WORLD ORDER* and the same political threats to the government in Figure 48: *NUREMBERG 2*

WILL BE A BLAST Labour Govt, and the same leader that they wished to be in charge, revealed in Figure 101: *TRUMP MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN*.

The support of Trump at the Wellington Protest therefore transforms our understanding of the protest from a leaderless one into one where the leader's apostles are present instead. No one was leading the protest because they already *had* a leader. He simply was not physically present. In the social media age, however, this does not make him any less *real* as a leader. Messages intended for in-group approval such as a satanic looking Dr Antony Fauci captioned as Figure 91: *DR EVIL* are probably not comprehensible to most of the New Zealand audience. We can therefore infer that as a message it was designed to be photographed and re-shared on social media platforms that *are* aware of conspiracies surrounding Fauci (Chen et al., 2023) and that at least a portion of the protestors were seeking approval from a group hyper-informed on MAGA-associated conspiracies.

Understanding the ways in which social media has transformed the reach of fascist leaders to a global base of potential supporters is how we can reconcile protestors in Trump masks, waving Trump flags, and wearing distinctive bright red MAGA hats at a protest on the other side of the world to where this iconography originated. Yet, there is a mediating factor to how radical or violent a movement can be when expanding the reach of the leader so far. Whilst social media spreads the message to the widest possible receptive audience, by divorcing the leader physically from a burgeoning fascist movement it possibly restricts the ability of a group to radicalise during key inflection points during the stages of fascism.

We can analyse this in the contrast between the Wellington Protest, which ended with the dispelling of the movement from parliament grounds despite violence on the final day, and the events of 6 January 2021 in Washington in which radicalised MAGA supporters went straight from a Trump rally and across to the Chamber of Congress in an attempt to stop the democratic transfer of power (Giroux, 2023). In Wellington, there was never the groundswell

of people necessary to storm Parliament proper, though 253 people were arrested on Parliament grounds during the duration of the protest (Osborne, 2023). The extra energy of the leader's physical presence on 6 January created a riot of a group who stormed the Capitol Building, damaging property, and causing the deaths of nine people and injuring police officers (Barreto et al., 2023).

Without the physical presence of Trump in Wellington, the protestors had to be content with idolatry and seeking the approval of others in the form of creating messages designed to be re-shared within their online in-group. Instead of adoring the leader outright, the messages on the signs were content with seeking approval of those who adore the leader. The protestor in Wellington draped in the American flag, adorned with MAGA hat, wearing a shirt emblazoned as Figure 23: *WE ARE Q WWGIWGA* is not seeking to overturn the vaccine mandate. They are seeking the approval of an transnational group, led by Trump, sending a message that *our influence reaches here too*.

Understanding this transnationalisation of the culture war from sovereign nation to social network (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019) allows us to transform the more traditionalist understanding of fascism that Paxton established in 1998. Whilst he described authentic fascism as being inherently and essentially nationalistic, he leaves the door open to changing future interpretation by insisting that analysis of fascism must be one of function rather than form. Essentially, a fascist movement should be judged by its goals and actions to achieve said goals, everything else is window dressing. In the case of the Wellington Protest, it was the end result of enormous transnational communities of conspiracy that formed as early as March 2020 (Curley et al., 2022) slowly become enmeshed and coopted by far-right, fascist actors. There is something in the way this online social dynamic was reflected as the convoy turned to occupation because the protest started to be a real-world manifestation of the cloistered online communities from which they initially emerged. There was no questioning

of messaging, but rather, a camp became an echo-chamber incarnate, inoculated against the outside messaging and breadth of societal opinion, and bidding for attention as being the most dedicated of their leader *in absentia*. This emergent online component is key to not just the coordination of the messaging of the protest, but also the origins of mis/disinformation, wider anti-government violent fantasy, and fascist narratives as a whole that permeated the Wellington Protest. It must be recognised by security scholars in New Zealand if they wish to understand not only what political forces *caused* the violence on parliament grounds, but what the aims of this movement may be into the future.

Chapter Four: Fascism in New Zealand

Nelken (2011) describes a lack of imagination in regards to the concept of society, where history and cultural instinct lead us to manifest societal boundaries that end at national borders – an apt description of New Zealand, where isolation permeates the cultural identity, as if rendering it insulated from the worst of global ills. Yet, thinking of Aotearoa as just as intimately connected with the world as any other internet-capable society helps to understand how the transnational connections outlined in the previous chapter are not arbitrary or purely academic, but rather, that they have discernible impact on New Zealand in a material sense. Any potential transnational impacts are exacerbated by the current local political climate as it stands: support for populism and thus the overall risks of a fascist movement, such as the Wellington Protest, is gaining support. New Zealand political sentiment falls broadly in line with global surveys, revealing a majoritarian support for a raft of populist positions, including two-thirds of New Zealanders wanting an outside political figure to take the country back from political elites (Dudding & Hercock, 2024). It is no coincidence that these exact phrases popped up two years before they were ever surveyed at the Wellington Protest in 2022. The broad-based support for the anti-system messaging at Wellington represents a political urgency that has been met so far with polite indifference or dismissiveness. The main findings of this chapter – namely, that risk factors for a fascist movement taking root in New Zealand are high, that groups from the Wellington Protest may already be having a material impact on Government policy, and that these groups shared identical language from groups overseas who subsequently went and achieved political success in recent European elections (Fominaya, 2024) – cannot be comprehended with urgency by politicians and academics who are either too wealthy to feel the radicalising effects of income inequality and plummeting home-ownership, or belong to a generation that does not engage with the social media sphere in the same way younger generations do, and is thus naïve to its effects.

Fascism Risk Factors are High in New Zealand

There is, I believe, a question that academics and politicians have avoided asking themselves in regards to the Wellington Protest: *why the presence of Trump specifically?* Although I have outlined the transnational connections through the signs and actions of fascist, anti-government movements around the world that pre-empted the experience of our own convoy and occupation, the ghost-like presence of Trump support during the Wellington Protest seems to have been taken as a given, rather than an invitation for analysis as to what he represents to those who support him here in New Zealand. I find that there is a disconnect between scholarly understanding of inter-war fascism's international connections and ambitions (Bauerkämper & Rossoliński, 2017; Herren, 2016; Steffek, 2015), and the current perception of the transnational support that Trump, himself a fascist (Paxton, 2021), receives around the world.

Anthropic Test-Case of Wider Support

An anthropic approach – whereby the conditions of possibility are proven because an event did happen – helps us understand that the conditions for protest must have been present because the protest *did* happen. We must evaluate the possibilities that the protestors were either a fringe group of dedicated radicals of whom were all present at the occupation, which is how they were interpreted by most politicians or simply the most extreme end of dedication of a more broadly popular sentiment, as evidenced by IPSOS populist survey results (Dudding & Hercock, 2024). There are two pieces of evidence across varying points in time that we can use to explore this: firstly, the convoy being met along the way by supporters in towns and along highways; and secondly, the swelling in size of the protest during weekends as a manifestation of protest *against* the political establishment (Russell, 2022).

Firstly, during the convoy there were a significant number of supporters and signs lining the streets as the convoy went past. The triumphant nature of these signs is consistent, with encouragement and calls for freedom being by far the most common, as seen in Figure 134: *THANK YOU! KEEP FIGHTING FOR OUR FREEDOM!* If we believed that the occupation was simply a small group, of whom all were dedicated and part of the protest, then we would expect these messages of support to be *in* the convoy, rather than the less involved, but still clearly supportive, manner of hanging signs from rural highways, such as Figure 18: *UNITE 4 FREEDOM WE ♥ TRUCKIES*, and lining the streets of their towns as the convoy passed. If the base of support of messaging for the convoy was large and broad based, then we would expect a range of protest activity from tweets sent from the couch, to lining the streets, to convoying to Parliament grounds. The convoy, passing as it did through rural areas and towns, also allowed those in these areas to voice their significant support in a way that mirrors how early stage fascist movements garnered support in late 1920's Germany (Grill, 1982). This is what Voices For Freedom, as organisers of the convoy, seemed to be aiming for with their signs attempting to ally with rural activist groups, including Figure 27: *TOOT FOR FARMERS!* There is an important, albeit anecdotal, caveat to the highway support of these groups because, in my personal experience of the convoy on the Napier-Taupō road, it seemed to have smaller groups with signs and flags speeding ahead, waving their support as the convoy rolled past, then rejoining at the back. I cannot rule out coordination of this support taking place around towns and cities too, but I suspect that this was taking place to create filmable pieces of content that showed support on a completely unpopulated stretch of road, rather than the modus operandi of the convoy throughout.

The second piece of evidence of wider support is that during the occupation of Parliament grounds there was a significant swelling of the protest over weekends. Both the nature and messaging of the signs changed during these periods. The signage was more likely

to be on the extreme ends of quality because handheld signs were more planned, organised in groups, and more likely to be printed. This is evident in Figure 135: *If I wanted a MANDATE I'd be on Grindr*. At the other end of the scale, lower effort signs, such as stickers and chalk messages, were prevalent, with messages of support. General platitudes, such as Figure 136: *AROHA* and jokes were much more common than the prototypical hand-written sign seen during the weekday-majority of the protest. The more jocular tone of these weekend signs is revealing in of itself because it contrasts with the frequently serious and political-attack nature of those at the protest who were camped out. The tragedy tourist is a possibility (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005), as those who were curious about the media portrayal of what had quickly become a rather infamous occupation (Clark, 2022). But the swelling of messages of support both scrawled opportunistically in chalk and well-planned, printed efforts makes it more likely that those attending on the weekend were from the Wellington region and who wanted to take part, but did not want to camp out on Parliament grounds and took a less serious approach to messaging that was more in line with the lower personal stakes they had invested; see for instance: Figure 137: *AUTOBOTS*.

There is a compelling case that the Wellington Protest is an example of Paxton's "mass, popular enthusiasm" (Paxton, 1998. p.3), rather than being a niche movement. It seems the convoy was self-aware of how they may be perceived too, with Figure 138: *HONK HONK who's there? The Fringe Minority, BITC* being a sarcastic statement. It shows that those involved saw their convoy as the 'coming out party' of a wider movement, rather than a final throw of the dice for a small group of conspiracy theorists, as portrayed in the media at the time (Clark, 2022). There is also a self-awareness in which the protest keeps its enthusiasm up even from the earliest stages of the convoy, where forms of internal communications via sign were already taking place. Many of the people pulled over and waving signs of support, tooting and cheering were all in cars decorated in the same manner

as those heading through. Passing through bridges and towns this may not be readily apparent, but during my chance encounter on the Napier/Taupō road there were six-ten vehicles parked up ahead of the main convoy waving flags as they went past at multiple points. Given the remoteness of the road, it is reasonable to assume that these were some of the earliest representations of group solidarity/cohesion, where the purpose of these signs was exclusively for the purpose of fostering group unity and morale. Given this conclusion, it again seems the more likely scenario that members who comprised the convoy and the occupation were the most dedicated of a larger political movement that was railing against elitism, wealth inequality, and rising instability in the wake of Covid-19 (Fominaya, 2024; Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021).

There is an urgency that stems from this understanding that these views *do* have broad-based support through their anti-political views. Groups, such as Action Zealania, which is a white supremacist, paramilitary style organisation (Wilson & Halpin, 2023), also see themselves as part of a mass movement, preferring to be on standby as the so-called brownshirts of any new movement that requires them. Rather than committing acts of violence, they commit acts of intimidation, general vandalism, and threats to those who they see themselves as ideologically against, forming a mirror image of the way in which the Wellington Protest created permissive space through its use of language. The reason that Action Zealania matters, despite no visible connection to the Wellington Protest, is because of their shared anti-government leanings with those who were present on Parliament grounds. Both see themselves as leaders of visions for a *new* New Zealand, and both take language and ideals from their online communities that are transnationally embedded. Fascist movements form when radical conspiracy groups merge (Chambers, 2023; Jackson, 2022) and we should not discount the ability of a group, such as Action Zealania, to find common ground in the future with those groups that emerged from the Wellington Protest.

Birth of Fascism Through Political Liberty

It is ironic that the democratic right to freedom of expression was used on Parliament lawns to explicitly advocate for the hanging of a democratically-elected Prime Minister. If anything, this situation offers a perfect illustration of the permissive space of Paxton's democracy being needed to allow fascism to spread and flourish. A twist on the more familiar paradox of tolerance (Rosenfeld, 1986), Paxton (1998) states that fascism can only be birthed in a society with known political liberty. The fact that a group was able to stand on the front lawn of Parliament and advocate the hanging of its members, as evident in Figure 48:

NUREMBERG 2 WILL BE A BLAST Labour Govt, with minimal intervention by Police until weeks into the occupation is proof that this permissive space was present. This was not unique to New Zealand however, as it was a major feature in other democracies, such as Canada and Italy, who experienced similar protests in the form of the Ottawa Truckers protest and the invasion of Union headquarters in Rome. Police were non-confrontational and reluctant to intervene in the case of the Ottawa protest, leading to significant disruption for the city and its citizens (Pinheiro, 2021). In the case of Italy's anti-vaccine pass protest, Police were surprised and, at times, overwhelmed by the violence and speed with which the protest moved, shutting down central Rome overnight (Pietrucci, 2023).

There was a cognitive dissonance among those who occupied Parliament grounds because they believed that democracy had failed them to the point their protest was necessary, whilst simultaneously being *allowed* to voice their concerns, scuffle with police, and advocate for violence at the very seat of democracy in New Zealand. The reason that Paxton zeroes in on sufficient political liberty as necessary is that it provides the time and space for a movement to radicalise over time. Indeed, we can see this is exactly what happened over the course of the occupation.

Although much of the messaging of the Wellington Protest emerged from mature transnational Telegram communities (Curley et al., 2022; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023), there was still contrast in tone between the triumph and catharsis of messages during the convoy phase, as seen in Figure 139: *STOP THE MANDATE #FREEDOM* and the final week of the occupation where signs were more confrontational, as seen in Figure 117: *GOVERNMENT ARE THE VIRUS*, Figure 80: *IT'S A POLITICAL OPERATION COVID 19 IS STATE TERRORISM*, and Figure 10: *CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IS A SACRED DUTY WHEN THE STATE BECOMES LAWLESS*. By this point, instead of demanding the government end the mandates – the usual imploring function of a protest group – the signs had become more fascistic in the way contemporary scholars describe, where the sentiments are explicitly *anti-government* itself (Russell, 2023), advocating violence against least *this specific* Labour government (Marcks & Pawelz, 2022), if not the general function of government itself in their global conspiracist world-view (Chambers, 2023; Liao, 2022).

Under significant pressure to not come across as heavy-handed, New Zealand Police played a role in this. According to the Independent Police Conduct Authority report into complaints levied at Police during the protest (2023), there was reticence to engage with the protest, and police – as in Ottawa (Pinheiro, 2021) – found themselves stuck between allowing this permissive space to protest whilst attempting to keep any violent tendencies at bay. Previously, those with anti-mandate/lockdown views had encountered the difficulties of protesting a decision that limited gatherings by law. For many of those at the protest who believed what they were fighting for was literally a matter of life and death (Marcks & Pawelz, 2022), illustrated by Figure 57: *NZ MEDIA part of GENOCIDAL MURDER*, the ability to finally organise and communicate their message seems to have been something of a catharsis in which they revelled.

The occupation created this permissive space for themselves via constant and effective messaging against the Police, accusing them of both violence in advance and making signs out of incidents occurring during clashes between protestors and police. Figure 141: *Police Restore your mana - Say Sorry For the Violence You Brought to this peaceful occupation, NZ Police I showed up because of you* and Figure 44 *THIS IS A PEACEFUL PROTEST NO MORE VIOLENCE PLEASE POLICE* were typical of the sort of messages that were on prominent display during the course of the occupation. Keeping these messages displayed prominently allowed the occupation to control the messaging of how the police and the protest interacted. By keeping these accusations of violence-in-advance front and centre, often on the front line and literally in the face of the Police line that was often present, the occupation ensured that any of the depictions in the media of crowd vs police – regardless of how peaceful – had signs held by protestors telling any prospective audience that the Police were the true aggressors, placing themselves in the role of the perpetual victimhood of fascism past (Tilles, 2006). This created not only the permissive space to protest, but also to enact violence in the manner of overseas anti-lockdown fascistic protest that had just occurred (Pietrucci, 2023). There was a degradation of the already shaky relationship between the protest and the Police too because, by the occupation's final day, the frequently displayed sign in Figure 142: *NZ POLICE, We are doing this for you too* had been replaced with signs like Figure 74: *Police State?* and Figure 50: *Hang 'em high*, which was scrawled in chalk directly in front of the police line.

Populist Sentiment – The Fuel of Fascism

Scholars, such as Paxton (1998), Cassam (2020), and Grill (1982), point to the risk factors of fascism being polarisation and political deadlock, arguing that in these socio-political environments a population is primed to more readily accept a politician – even if the views are extreme – so long as they promise to rail against a system of perceived elites and get

things done politically. We see this with the election of Donald Trump in 2016, with a significant portion of his votes coming from former democrats who swung from Obama to Trump because they liked his promises to shake up the political system even if they found him personally distasteful (Burgers et al., 2019). This is the promise of fascists everywhere: “make the trains run on time” was the oft-referenced counterpoint to those who opposed Mussolini (Parenti, 1997), all other aspects of his character were rendered acceptable because he could break the political deadlock and achieve real-world progress for his voters. Of course, this is just like Trump’s promise he would “[b]uild the wall” (Sagas & Roman, 2020), which was never fulfilled. The goal of fascists is, first and foremost, to achieve political power through a shared ideology by any means necessary (Trevor-Roper, 1968) and delivering new infrastructure come a distant second at best. However, those who vote for fascists may do so because they promise to harms, in many different ways, their political opponents or other social groups segments. But to achieve political power, fascism must convince a voting-bloc that *they can achieve change for the common person* (Rosenfeld, 2017).

Polarisation

To bring this back to the New Zealand context, there is no reason to believe that we have not been affected by the well-documented increase of political polarisation in the social-media age (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021). As discussed in the previous chapter, New Zealand is no less insulated against the effects of social media algorithm silos than anyone else, and over the pandemic, which was a time of upheaval and isolation, we should expect to see the general population *more* polarised than ever. This is borne out in overseas research (Jiang et al., 2020), as well as covid-era research here, which found that, although there was only a minor increase in polarisation of political beliefs in New Zealand from 2009-2018 (Satherley

et al., 2020), even in this pre-covid period that polarisation around vaccine beliefs in New Zealand was on the rise (Lee & Sibley, 2020).

Despite starting and emerging from social media, this increasing polarisation is having real-world consequences too. Shahin (2023) found that increasing polarisation online is fuelled by outgroup hostility and tying identity to *opposing* other groups, rather than creating identity as part of one's own group. Additionally, Shahin (2023) found that this tendency of polarised outgroup hostility is leading to increasing amounts of counter-protesting and clashes, becoming a real-world consequence of social media behaviour. We can see this in the Wellington Protest, which I analysed as having a wide range of political and social views as long as one was strongly anti the Labour Government. Other protests since have also showed the tendency for counter-protests, such as the Anti-Trans Posie Parker and counter-protest at Auckland Domain (Tan, 2023). I argue that, given these factors, we would have seen significant counter-protest to the Wellington Protest too, but these were suppressed by both the gathering restrictions of the time and the publicised poor behaviour of some of the protestors achieving significant media attention, thus dissuading potential counter-protestors.

Apart from the social media aspect of polarisation, there is evidence too of a growing socioeconomic divide in New Zealand (Dean, 2015). This is only becoming worse as wealth inequality grows due to the schism in house prices since the early 2000s, surging cost of living in food and rent, and relatively low wages compared to the rest of the OECD. This fundamental economic polarisation is a risk factor for fascism because of the tendency of those who lack individual mobility to take more risks, at least according to Prospect Theory (Levy, 1992). In New Zealand, the proportion of renters is steadily increasing into the 40%-range, yet the current proportion of renters in Parliament is just 7%, with the average Member of Parliament owning 2.2 properties, a number that jumps to three for Cabinet members. To

put a finer point on it, there are more current Members of Parliament with seven properties than those with none (Edwards, 2024). This theme of economic precarity was prevalent in the vaccine mandate-focused messaging at the protest, with many signs referencing that they simply wanted to work, evident in Figure 53: *LET PEOPLE WORK*, that people were worried about the impacts of the mandates on their business as shown in Figure 143: *JACINDA IS DESTROYING OUR LIVELIHOODS*, and that people believed the government was hypocritical in its stance of standing down nurses and teachers after a period of heaping praise on them for the previous two years, as illustrated in Figure 144: *Q..... ARE WE CLAPPING OR SACKING OUR HEROES THIS WEEK?* (Many of the protestors saw the then- Labour Government as out of touch, and needing to be removed, as called for in Figure 145: *NO LABOUR NO PROBLEM*. A fascist tendency of advocating violence against their political opponents (Martel et al., 2024) was plain to see in Figure 49” *HANG THEM ALL*.

Deadlock

Importantly, when it comes to opinions on how the economy is performing and the effectiveness of political leaders, the views expressed at the Wellington Protest were not just representative of a fringe minority that were there on Parliament grounds, or even the wider anti-vax movement in general. They represented the *majority* of New Zealanders. A comprehensive 2024 survey on populist attitudes (Dudding & Hercock, 2024) revealed a number of corroborating, broad-based sentiments that can be, and have been, tapped into previously as a primed public ready for the populist messaging that fascism is predicated upon. In terms of how those surveyed viewed things economically, 60% agreed with the statement that “[t]he main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite”, 63% agreed with “[t]he political and economic elite don't care about hard-working people” and 65% – nearly 2 in 3 – agreed with “New Zealand’s economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful”. These sort of messages are independent of left

and right political ideology, and much more predicated on the division of wealth, polarisation, and distrust of political elites that fuel the necessary groundswell required for fascist support (Paxton, 1998).

Another significant aspect of the sentiment revealed by the survey, which is still present in the economic messages, was that of deep distrust that the political class had the interest of the majority in mind. Just over half (55% and 56% respectively) agreed with the messages “[t]raditional parties and politicians don’t care about people like me” and “[e]xperts in this country don’t understand the lives of people like me”. Both statements are equally illuminating for varying reasons. The distrust of traditional political parties is not a new phenomenon, but the effects of social media as mass-progenitor of misinformation have made this distrust much more pronounced (Darius & Urquhart, 2021; Persily et al., 2020). Still, healthy scepticism of political parties is not a new or particularly worrying phenomenon, but anti-academic/expert views appear to have surged in the social media age (Oksanen et al., 2022; Carter Olson & LaPoe, 2018). Michael Gove, then Lord Chancellor of the United Kingdom, remarked of the Brexit campaign that “[t]his country is sick of listening to experts” (Portes, 2017). Whilst much derided, this quip was clearly closer to public sentiment than expected, with Brexit passing, and the normalisation of ‘alternative facts’ from the very beginnings of the Trump era soon after (Barrera et al., 2020). The anti-expert mentality is a significant aspect of the Wellington Protest in particular, with anti-expert signs forming a key component of the messaging in signs such Figure 131: *TRYING TO FOLLOW THE SCIENCE... BUT IT KEEPS LEADING ME BACK TO THE MONEY!*. This is somewhat unsurprising considering that anyone who *did* believe the science and experts would have likely taken the vaccine and that to maintain one’s position as part of a conspiratorially fascist online community, political elites are no longer to be trusted.

There is a more nebulous and possibly impactful aspect that the survey revealed. 60% surveyed agreed with the statement that “New Zealand is in decline” and only 2% less going further, agreeing with the statement that “New Zealand society is broken”. These are the sort of societal sentiments that imply a population does not believe that politics and society is serving them, or *can* serve them. However, as an important caveat, it is not known whether this sort of surveyed sentiment is reflective of those who believe they have been pushed out of the system, the system has changed, or that New Zealand society may have changed so much that, to their eyes, it seems broken, regardless of their own individual success. Even given the wide range of interpretation, having such a large section of the population believing society is *broken* is a worrying sign that many in New Zealand agreed with the societal split that the Wellington Protest noted, even if they were pro-vaccine, as indicated in Figure 9:

THEY ARE WILLING TO TEAR SOCIETY APART TO JAB ALMOST EVERYONE. WILL YOU LET THEM SUCCEED?

Most worrying, but perhaps least surprising, was the surveyed question that had the greatest support. A staggering 66% of New Zealanders agreed with the statement that “New Zealand needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful”. This means two out of three New Zealanders are extremely susceptible to the sort of messaging present at the Wellington Protest. I argue that this level of support is an explanatory variable in the display of Trump flags at the protest, with such high levels of support of the “take the country back” message suggesting that the population *in general* is much more open to the messaging of a fascist like Trump. Understanding this level of approval allows us to cast back and reframe the Wellington Protest as, perhaps, a fringe group in terms of its anti-vax *message*, but more a movement that has the support of over half the country in terms of *sentiment*. To use the analogy of weather forecasting: the Wellington Protest took place in a

primed atmosphere of sentiment that allowed it to explode into the thunderstorm of an occupation.

Considering that fascism is built on anti-elitist, populist sentiment (Wirz, 2018), I believe that, rather ironically, the most politician and academics have underrated the risk of fascism in New Zealand. The Wellington Protest has been dismissed as conspiracy by Ardern, despite the fact that, in their own words, the protestors were much more concerned with threats of violence against Ardern herself than whichever conspiratorial justification they were using, like Figure 47: “*JABCINDA NUREMBURG CODE IS GOING TO GET YOU!*”. We know that fascism thrives on inequality and deadlock (Paxton, 1998), and the surveys revealed significant support for the views that New Zealand is no longer economically fair, or offers the opportunity for political recourse within the current system. When it comes to fascism though, there seems to be an attitude of ‘it can’t happen here’ (Hinton, 2021). Yet, the United States currently has a presidential nominee that is declared a fascist by the foundational scholar of modern fascist study (Paxton, 2021), Brazil is still emerging from the Bolsonaro Presidency, which has been described by multiple speakers at OFPS 2023 as fascist, and Germany is seeing a resurgence of its far-right party in the wake of economic unrest and anti-immigration sentiment (Fominaya, 2024). To assume that fascism could not happen here is to ignore the global and national political climate that is conducive to a fascist movement, especially when there is a staggering two-thirds majority of surveyed New Zealanders that would support a populist/potential fascist, according to the IPSOS survey (Dudding & Hercock, 2024). This level of populist, anti-government support should be raising alarm bells politically because a *majoritarian* percentage of the population is not happy with *any* of their current political choices. The Wellington Protest should be seen as a warning. Despite ostensibly being about vaccines, in their own language of the signs, it was truly about being *anti-government*. Despite the Labour Government – and particularly Ardern

– being targeted by the Wellington Protest, the sentiments are best coded as not just anti-Labour, but anti-government (Russell, 2022). They should be taken seriously as a sign of a burgeoning anti-democratic threat we may not see the true scope of. This is due to the nature of online communities in which they organise (Curley et al., 2022) and their insulation from the economic drivers of populist sentiment. Politicians and the academics are less likely to understand and with the she'll-be-right mentality, do-not-cause-a-fuss nature of New Zealand culture, may be unwilling to confront, or even worry about.

Missed and Misunderstood Signs of Fascism in New Zealand

Historically, foundational scholars on fascism, such as Paxton (1998), posited that fascist movements are inherently nationalistic, unique to each country, and trade in language and imagery that makes them unviable political movements to export to other countries. Recently, however, the resurgence of fascism internationally has led scholars to reexamine the transnational aims of inter-war European fascism. They found that there *were* significant transnational linkages in both organisation and ideology (Bauerkämper & Rossoliński, 2017; Herren, 2016; Steffek, 2015). However, the powerful influence of the internet and social media has started to blur the lines between ideologies and the blood-and-soil of historical fascisms even further (Hermansson et al., 2020). The Wellington Protest was organised, rapidly, in three weeks through online channels, particularly the social network/messaging site Telegram (Hannah et al., 2022), in a manner that would have been difficult for foundational Fascism scholars to comprehend when they first published.

Yet, the more important change caused by social media is a societal one. Trump flags were waved alongside Tinorangaitratanga, MAGA slogans were repurposed for the protest as seen in Figure 146: *MAKE INFLUENZA GREAT AGAIN*, and Republican rallying cries were held by those in Trump masks holding signs like Figure 133: *LET'S GO BRANDON*. Put simply, there has been a fundamental blurring of the lines when it comes to political issues

people care about thanks to social media, especially where community interaction takes place among internally reflective, self-selected online groups (Del Vicario et al., 2016). The overwhelming deluge of American politics in online spaces (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023) has been refolded back into online discourse and erupted out into the real world of Wellington, on the other side of the globe.

New Zealand security scholars have thus far largely focused on the Wellington Protest as a manifestation of national unrest, conspiracy, and anti-Labour sentiment (Clark, 2022; Hannah et al., 2022; Sapkota, 2022). Missing from their work is an examination and comparison of the language and nature of the protest's language not just online, but in the wider scheme of organised, anti-government protests globally (Russell, 2022). By 2021, it was not just Covid-19 that had become endemic in every country around the globe (Fominaya, 2024) because dealing with a one-in-a-hundred-year pandemic had brought with it the conditions of economic unrest and social media conspiracy fervour created by death and lockdowns. Like Covid-19, these too had become endemic to varying degrees across the globe and, as such with Covid, certain countries suffered more severely than others.

Widening economic dissatisfaction and social unrest (in this case social *media* unrest for those stuck inside) have long been known as the fuel of fascism (Paxton, 1998). Canadian security scholars have attempted to establish whether the conditions of lockdowns could exacerbate social unrest through increased exposure to extremist communities. They found there was a logical correlation (Kelshall et al., 2020), though their solution of individually removing each piece of *explicitly illegal only* misinformation as it was posted can be generously described as unworkable at best, given the size and quantity of disinformation emerging from Telegram alone (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023).

There has been little mainstream analysis from security scholars, or self-reflection of politicians, of the risk factors for fascism (Paxton, 1998) being exacerbated by the neo-liberal

reforms in the 1980's, where most anglosphere countries had experienced a widening of inequality (Sowels, 2019). New Zealand in particular had sharp increases of wealth inequality and experienced a weakening of the social safety net after the so-called 'Mother of All Budgets' in 1991 (Dean, 2015), significant immigration pressures, and a housing crisis that had seen house prices soar out of reach for (particularly younger) generations (Rashbrooke, 2021). Put in another way, the fundamental risks for a broad-based support of fascism remained relatively high despite New Zealand's widely praised initial Covid response (Jamieson, 2020; Jefferies et al., 2020) as a large chunk of the population were at risk of catastrophe from any economic shock, and social/racial divisions came to the fore as the country borders closed (Ergler et al., 2021).

The signs at the Wellington Protest reflect these sentiments. Figure 15: *I'M SORRY YOU HAD TO SHUT YOUR SHOP FOR PROTESTORS BUT I LOST MY JOB & MY HOME* is indicative of how fascist movements start, with those at risk of losing it all more likely to hitch their wagon to a group/someone who promises the radical renewal of a country in their image. Likewise, Figure 6: *I'm not a Racist I'm not an activist I AM A KIWI!!* raises questions they wish to be answered in advance by their sign, where the long doublespeak/dog whistle of 'regular kiwis' (MacDonald, 2023) – meaning white Anglo-Saxon – has been shortened as a one-word answer to the presumed questions this person expected to be asked of 'are you a racist? Are you an activist?' These sentiments are the underlying bubbling of discontent needed to fuel fascism and inspire those who wake up and decide that their country neither reflects nor serves them anymore. These are the people who have been highlighted as the *rational fascist* that are essential to building early-stage fascist movements by Brustein and Markovsky (1989). They posit the primary identified trait between those who supported early German and Italian fascist movements and those who did not were beliefs on whether the Fascist Party would address their economic grievances. This should be of major concern to

New Zealand security scholars given the level of economic grievance that is currently present in New Zealand (Dudding & Hercock, 2024).

Why No Links Drawn?

Given the risks present and the violent nature of the protest in terms of both declarative intent and final-day outcome, why has there been little attempt by the New Zealand scholarly community to analyse the protest as in-line with previous and studied contemporary fascisms, such as those examined in the excellent *Histories of Hate* (Smith, 2023)? The answer probably lies in a cluster of misunderstandings surrounding how fascism operates. Firstly, fascism is technologically savvy, changeable, and reflects the times in which it emerges in (Paxton, 1998; Brose, 1987). We should *expect* that in the social media/information age a new upswelling of fascism would emerge in online spaces first during a time when the only way people *could* communicate was online (Kelshall et al., 2020). This has already happened with other separate violent ideologies, even those based on race, nationality, and religion (Hermansson et al., 2020), as far back as a decade, with the Oslo 2013 terror attack by Anders Breivik being the first revealing of supremacist identity constructed around the concept of a white, pan-European ethno-state (Jackson, 2013). This transformation opens the door for what was previously a nationality-centric aspect of fascist identity, of which the Aryan Nazi is the most infamous, to morph into an identity that can cross borders, if not continents. For white supremacists, this meant the conglomeration of various nationalisms into a franchisable ‘white’ identity, but if we take the anti-vaccine movement globally we can take the identity of ‘unvaxxed’ represented in Figure 147: *UNMASKED UNVAXXED UNAFRAID* or the broader conspiracy mindset of ‘freedom from government control’ Figure 148: *IT'S NOT ABOUT HEALTH IT'S ABOUT CONTROL* that has emerged post-covid in the sovereign citizen movement (Ong, 2020).

This is pertinent when we examine the formation of what a fascist identity looks like in a post-social media age. Paxton (1998) points out that we should expect fascisms to reflect their time and space; that is, European fascism to be antisemitic; American fascism to be religious and anti-Islamic. In New Zealand, we had a distinctly Aotearoa identity at the protest, with its use of the hikoi and Te Reo. Despite this, when the majority of the messages were pertaining to personal freedoms and the construction of the unvaccinated identity, we can see this normalised use of Te Reo being used as camouflage over the top of existing slogans in the movement overseas, as demonstrated by Figure 17: *WE SPEAK FOR ALL TAMARIKI*. This echoes the chants of “*Hands off the children!*” that resounded from the Madrid protest in Spain on 16 August (Fominaya, 2024. p.8). The space and time we live in has shrunk exponentially with social media, yet our exposure to overseas rhetoric and issues has never been greater. With the ability to lock oneself into a radical social group whilst sitting at a computer, there is no reason we should not expect those powerful online identities, such as those formed in the anti-vaccine/conspiracy movement, are strong enough to become an identitarian bedrock on which a fascist movement can build upon.

QAnon Case

We can test this case with the presence of QAnon, which is an all-encompassing conspiracy theory centred around Donald Trump being their saviour from a ‘deep state’, that has already been established as a security threat responsible for violence – including murders – in the United States (Hummel, 2020). The presence of QAnon on social media has been shown to have a global effect on conspiratorial groups generally (Garry et al., 2021), with Schulze et al. (2022) establishing that the societal instability caused by the pandemic created the conditions for QAnon content to flourish. They also found that as QAnon content spread support for political activism and violence increased. Zehring and Domahidi (2023) provide the final link back to the Wellington Protest, finding in their analysis of Telegram anti-

lockdown groups that QAnon was having an increasing impact on the organising groups from which the New Zealand protests emerged only a few months later.

Seeing the shirts found in Figure 23: *WE ARE Q WWGIWGA* present in Wellington correlates with the conspiratorial view of the world that much of the protest had, especially regarding Ardern and the traditional media, as illustrated by Figure 58: *666 -> MEDIA*. There seems to be a growing understanding in scholarship that the belief in QAnon is so pervasive, in its demanding of worldview adherence, reading ‘scripture’, and having faith in cataclysmic rebirth to come, that it constitutes some form of new religion (Argentino, 2022). We saw this in Wellington too, with much of the extreme language against the media and government having religious undertones in the manner that MacMillen and Rush (2022) describe when they call QAnon a religious emergence and lens to view the world that fuels paranoia and resentment. In that respect, consider the significance of Figure 149: *JABCINDA WE KNOW!! YOU SOLD YOUR SOUL TO THE DEVIL*. Much as the presence of Trump flags at Wellington *should* be considered unusual – and revealing – at a protest in New Zealand, the lack of scholarly discussion around the presence of QAnon at the Wellington Protest, given the ideological intensity (Argentino, 2022), proven history of violence (Hummel, 2020), and links to other protests in Germany and elsewhere that had already experienced violence from protests over the same issues (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023), was surprising.

The Fascist Franchise Has Landed

In light of this evidence, New Zealand security practitioners and scholars could usefully conduct investigations and inquiries into the groups that attended the Wellington Protest by understanding them as a franchise of a transnational movement. There has been little public or publicised understanding of where the funding comes from to run these movements, what form of support are they receiving – monetarily or otherwise – from overseas groups, and whether this is a transnational movement or the product of potential

foreign interference. Individuals involved with Counterspin Media who were heavily involved with the Wellington Protest and the movements that emerged from it, were recently flown to Russia for meetings. Kelvyn Alp, founder of Counterspin Media, would be a prime candidate to bring back some form of franchised fascism to New Zealand and may already be doing so given the prominent role that Counterspin plays in disseminating disinformation to New Zealanders (Clark, 2022). I believe that the limitations of imagination have not kept up with the dynamic transnational connections that are forged daily in groups like Telegram.

Lead-in Time

Other anti-lockdown/anti-vaccine pass protests occurring overseas that also experience violence brings up a temporal factor that needs to be considered with the convoy to Wellington and resulting occupation of Parliament grounds. New Zealand dealt with significant lockdowns and vaccine mandates much later than other countries, as soon as March 2020, thanks to having one of the fastest and strictest lockdowns and border security (Jamieson, 2020). This meant during that time not only could people in New Zealand not protest the lockdown for fear of being arrested, but they were also immediately confronted with the fact that the lockdown worked because after nine long weeks New Zealand had become Covid-free, albeit temporarily. However, by the start of 2022 when the protest took place, New Zealand and Auckland in particular had endured additional months of lockdowns. Residents were only allowed to return to normalcy once vaccine rates had met government mandated thresholds (Datta et al., 2024). This meant that those who wished to oppose government mandates were at least a full year behind places like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, all of whom saw significant unrest from 2020-early to 2022 (Pietrucci, 2023; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023). Therefore, much of the anti-government material that *could* be used in the Wellington Protest had already effectively been market-tested overseas, which could explain the tendency of much of the messaging to be sloganistic and non-

specific, especially those pre-printed from group. such as Voices for Freedom, as seen in Figure 103: *I AM NOT YOUR EXPERIMENT*. More specifically, the Wellington Protest was not even the first *convoy* to protest vaccine mandates, with the Ottawa Truckers Convoy taking place only a few weeks earlier (Gillies et al., 2023). It appears that the concept of the convey. much like the messaging surrounding the convoy itself, was an overseas, market-tested method that had been appropriated into the New Zealand context through the use of Te Reo, with ‘convoy’ becoming ‘hikoi’, and replacing prominent North American political figures like Dr Antony Fauci, Justin Trudeau, and Joe Biden with their New Zealand counterparts of Jacinda Ardern, Chris Hipkins, and Dr Ashley Bloomfield, as demonstrated by Figure 121: *NUREMBERG ARDERN. HIPKINS. BLOOMFIELD. TRIALS*. Given that these protests over the *exact* same issues, using the *exact same* language, took place up to years before the convoy to Wellington started, I am surprised that no New Zealand security scholars were raising alarm bells that the country might experience similar violent, fascist-allied protests which had already occurred in other capitals across Europe and North America.

New Zealand Political Impacts of the Protest

These transnational connections have made little impact on the security studies scholarship in New Zealand, which has been more concerned with issues of national security strategy and radical individual terror attacks in the wake of the Christchurch Mosque shootings (Battersby, 2020; Battersby & Ball, 2019; Crothers & O’Brien, 2020; Rivera et al., 2023). There has been relatively minor concern for the Wellington Protest as a security threat, despite the fact that it clogged the capital city for weeks, intimidated local workers (O’Brien & Huntington, 2022), created a Covid outbreak during legal restrictions on gatherings, physically attacked media (Sapkota, 2022), and led to 82 officers treated for injuries on the final day as police faced thrown cobblestones and hand-to-hand combat as they cleared the protest from Parliament grounds (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2023). This convoy

came on the back of worldwide protests both in the form of convoys and encampments on government grounds (Fominaya, 2024), and protests had already been occurring frequently at Auckland Domain, mostly from Brian Tamaki and Destiny Church (Aoake, 2022). Yet, despite New Zealand having the benefit of being the most recent recipient and, by extension, with the most warning time for this franchise of fascistic protests, the scholarly community and security services seemed to be taken off guard. Preceding the Wellington Protest, other groups at Auckland Domain had been dismissed as fringe actors, who were annoying but largely inconsequential. Whilst the odd persistent breakers of lockdowns were arrested and charged (Clark, 2022), compliance was usually enforced with plenty of leeway.

The Coming Out Party of Fascism in New Zealand

My thesis focused on exploring the social, political, and technological conditions needed for the Wellington Protest in the hopes of answering the question *where did they come from?* To obtain full understanding however, we must explore the ramifications of the coming-out party of fascism in New Zealand by asking *where did they go?* If fascism's ultimate goal is the pursuit of political power (Kallis, 2006), and the Wellington Protest is a clear example of first-stage fascism (Paxton, 1998), then we should *expect* that there would be an attempted transition from the first to the second stage involving the pursuit of political power. Inattention to this aspect, whether through a belief that the protest was over – and thus the storm weathered – or a form of wilful misunderstanding that the political forces gathered at Wellington were the culmination of a movement rather than the origin of one, there has been little connection with the activities of groups like Counterspin Media, Reality Check Radio, or Voices For Freedom as tied to their emergence stemming from roles in the Wellington Protest.

My thesis' focus on the language used in the signs of those in the The Wellington Protest has shed light on not only the protestors' own words, through understanding exactly

they were saying and how they were saying it, but also insight into psyche, the *whys* of self-perception, and potential subsequent action, which can only be truly understood in this post-mortem moment in time. This form of work requires us to ask questions relating to both the socio-political context of this protest and the extent to which that context is conducive to fascism. Scholars have critiqued research on fascism for being too static in assessing fascism as a simple snapshot in time (Paxton, 1998) when in reality, fascism is built and grows support over time as long as conditions allow (Rosenfeld, 2017). Therefore, I assess the *actions* of those groups that emerged out of the Wellington Protest. When looking at Voices for Freedom, Democracy NZ, Reality Check Radio, and the policy transformation of New Zealand First, one can gain insight through understanding and analysing their language during the protest, and seeing whether that their behaviour afterward aligns with what we should expect in terms of the attempted attainment of political power (Paxton, 1998; Stanley, 2018).

Political Environment

The Labour Government was elected in November 2020 with the highest single-party majority under the Mixed Member Proportionate system (Cox, 2020), yet they lost the next General Election in a landslide. Occurring almost halfway into the Labour Government's second term, and in a much more contentious point in time following second lockdowns and vaccination programmes in 2021 (Officer et al., 2022; Lally, 2021), the Wellington Protest can be best interpreted as the bubbling up of discontent that formed the inflection point of public opinion swaying from historic praise to calling for Ardern to step aside, as seen in Figure 150: *N.Z. SAYS "NO" TO THE N.W.O. JABSINDA MUST GO!* and the subsequent heavy defeat of the Labour Government at the 2023 General Election. It may seem a long bow to draw, from an occupation of Parliament grounds to a changing of the New Zealand Government, yet Paxton (1998) correctly identifies that too often fascist movements are analysed in isolation of its underlying context. In the case under examination here, there was

significant support for the populist sentiment that fascism will likely be built on in New Zealand (Dudding & Hercock, 2024). The general population did not *like* lockdowns and vaccine mandates, but they *tolerated* them in order to keep themselves and their family safe (Officer et al., 2022). Yet, and rather ironically, once protected from the initial deadly threats of the first waves – alpha, delta, and omicron – the public quickly found themselves thrust back out into a radically different world economically, where the stimulus packages, OECD house price surges, and exponentially growing freight costs had caused inflationary economic pressures not seen in generations (Bayarmagnai, 2023). Labour, like many governments up for election at the time, paid the price of being left holding the bag (Atkins, 2022; Cameron et al., 2022; Durovic, 2023).

Moderating Factors

Despite this populace primed for populist messages that could be co-opted by fascism, there are significant moderating factors that prevented the Wellington Protest from becoming quickly entrenched as a major political force. Paxton (1998) explains that co-opting the centre-right is necessary for Fascism to obtain political power. During the Wellington Protest neither centre-right Members of Parliament nor any other sitting member meet personally with the protesters, despite the imploring of signs present, such as Figure 151: *Labour is Red, National is Blue Come out and see us, we might VOTE for you*. There were scattered calls in the signs asking for varying politicians to meet the protest, including Ardern, as seen in Figure 61: *JACINDA BE KIND TALK WITH THE PEOPLE!!* However, most of the calls asking for discussions with politicians came from quotes to the media or social media posts, rather than anything evidenced in my primary material of the signs. At various points Politicians came out to observe the protest on Parliament's lawn, but as a collective refused to meet them in person, communicating via media statements only. The only form of direct interaction the protestors had was with House Speaker Trevor Mallard, who quickly became

the focus of the protestors' ire when he ordered the Parliament lawn sprinklers turned on, Baby Shark and Celine Dion to be played at all hours, and otherwise made life as uncomfortable for the protestors as possible. Very quickly, signs and slogans started appearing that referenced Mallard: most of these were – unusually – jovial and joking in nature, which is probably a reflection of the intent of these particular signs to say 'you cannot dampen our spirits'. Figure 152: *ONLY WAY MALLARD GETS A GIRL WET* and Figure 153: *SEND MALLARD QUACKING* both refer to the sprinkler incident. Interestingly, Mallard seems to have made enough of an impression to subsequently feature on pre-prepared bumper stickers that appeared throughout the protest. Figure 87: *DUCK OFF MALLARD* was the second duck-themed bumper sticker that targeted the Speaker. Although it was understandable that the signs referring to him were exclusively negative given the antagonistic nature of the proxy-conflict that Mallard was engaging, the fact that the Speaker became the focus of ire so quickly could indicate either his lightning-rod status via increased interactions with the occupation or the partisan attitudes of the Wellington Protest more generally.

For me, one of the most fascinating signs implored Ardern to engage directly with the protestors, as seen in Figure 61: *JACINDA BE KIND TALK WITH THE PEOPLE!!* Although I am unable to date this particular sign, it stands out for being one of the only emotionally imploring messages to Ardern amongst a crowded field of slurs, sexism, and threats of violence. It cleverly uses her own 'be kind' slogan against her (Munford, 2021) and is a very effective sign from a messaging point of view. However, the *motivation* of the sign must be questioned because the nature of the messaging pervaded the rest of the protest. It was either politically naïve or disingenuous with the intention to lure Ardern out into the uncontrolled environment of the crowd. It seems that Arden, like all sitting Members of Parliament, decided that there was nothing to gain with engaging direct with the Wellington Protest,

labelling their activity as “unacceptable” and referring to the movement as “no longer a protest” (Mutch McKay, 2022).

Transition from First to Second Stage

“It is wiser to pay attention to the functions fulfilled by new movements of an analogous type, to the circumstances that could open a space to them, and to the potential conservative elite allies ready to try to coopt them rather than look for echoes of the rhetoric, the programs, or the aesthetic preferences of the protofascists”

(Paxton 1998, p.22)

Analysing the Wellington Protest in a temporal sense offers the opportunity to run a test case. *If the Wellington Protest is an example of Paxton’s first stage Fascism (1998), then what we would expect to happen next?* If the first stage is marked by an anger over the current political system and a conspiratorial fuelled desire to overturn it, as captured in Figure 10: *CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IS A SACRED DUTY WHEN THE STATE BECOMES LAWLESS*, then the second stage is about establishing a foothold *within* the political system itself (Paxton, 1998).

It is important to note that the transition from first to second stage is one of the most difficult in progressing a fascist movement because there is an inherent tension between postulation on the corruption and ineffectiveness of a political system and the subsequent attempt to obtain power within that system. There is, therefore, a political inertia on early fascist movements that pulls them either toward further radicalisation outside the system or moderation to fit within the system. The attainment of power *as* a fascist movement comes when the size of the movement, established outside the political system, becomes a carrot too large to be ignored by traditional conservative parties who are willing to make the Faustian

pact in order to obtain political power (Paxton, 1998). We can see this situation with the Republican acceptance of the Trump nomination (Tucker et al., 2019) and, much earlier, von Hindenburg acquiescing to appoint Hitler Chancellor in 1933 (Abel, 1986). If the occupation of Parliament grounds is a franchisee manifestation of a first-stage Fascist movement, then we should expect them to attempt to grow support outside the political system after the events of Wellington. This requires the movement to establish some form of organised political movement, co-opt willing political insiders, and spread the message widely in the hopes of growing the movement to a scale where allying with them as a voting bloc becomes a attractive to a traditional conservative party already inside the political system. Through language analysis tracing their involvement with the international fascist groups also protesting lockdowns (Fielitz & Marcks, 2019; Pietrucci, 2023), that, we can see that the Wellington Protest likely emerged from, and is embedded within, the large, transnational Telegram conspiracy groups that had coordinated and coalesced the far-right and conspiracy groups since March 2020 (Curley et al., 2022; Zehring & Domahidi, 2023). This means that there was likely this carrot of an energised, currently un-represented political movement there for willing politicians to capitalise on.

Perhaps this goes some way to explain why former National Party Member of Parliament Matt King and New Zealand First leader Winston Peters (MacDonald, 2019) decided that the Wellington Protest presented a powerful political opportunity. Seeking to return New Zealand First to Parliament, Peters met with protestors after many days of refusals from all sitting Members of Parliament. Figure 61: *“JACINDA BE KIND TALK WITH HTE PEOPLE!!* is, perhaps, unsurprising given Peters’ reputation as New Zealand’s perennial populist politician (Oldfield & Veen, 2023). Meeting with protestors on Parliament grounds allowed Peters to tap into the energy of the movement and to hear their concerns as well as create a significant media opportunity. Whilst having two former MP’s meet with a

protest that paraded antisemitic slurs and advocated the hanging of the Prime Minister is notable, it is much more interesting to see the lasting impact that these interactions had on the entrenchment into politics of the protestors, via these politicians.

Impacts on Political Parties in New Zealand

Of all the political forces which emerged from the Wellington Protest there were three distinct groups that had flow-on effects for the 2023 General Election, In order of least-to-greatest impact, these were the establishment of a raft of micro-parties, Democracy New Zealand's slickly political launch, and the co-option of New Zealand First policy that eventually led to their return to not only Parliament, but as coalition party of the conservative ruling majority.

The micro-parties reflect the protest as described by its detractors; that is, as messy, full of infighting, and based on unserious policy that would never work in the real world. These included Brian and Hannah Tamaki of Destiny Church leading the Freedoms NZ party with notable conspiracist Sue Grey, Northland former National MP Alfred Ngaro running a Christian fundamentalist campaign as NewZeal, and prominent Wellington protest figures Leighton Baker and Liz Gunn running as the Leighton Baker Party and New Zealand Loyal respectively. Most of these parties only managed to get a few thousand votes, with New Zealand Loyal and its attention grabbing 1% flat tax policy being the most successful with over 34 000 votes (Electoral Commission New Zealand, 2023). Most of these micro-parties achieved little politically beyond being an effective fundraising tool. However, combined, they gained over 75 000 votes, putting the support for the wider movement at the ballot box somewhere between the size of Napier and Palmerston North.

Despite its poor performance even in comparison to other start-up parties, I separate Democracy New Zealand from this group for the following two reasons: first, its leadership under former National MP Matt King, who as mentioned met with protestors; and, second, its

seemingly high-budget, slickly political design and sloganeering. Their slogan of “Freedom, Family, Farming” is remarkably similar to other populist movements parroting the traditional conservatism values whilst steadfastly saying they are neither “left nor right” (Eatwell, 1993). It also mirrors the support for farming of the Wellington Protest, as seen in Figure 27: *TOOT FOR FARMERS!*. Fascism requires the promise of a third way through the co-option of conservative politicians and their supporters, and Democracy New Zealand is positioning itself firmly in this mould of a party that promises a return to greatness and an appeal to nostalgia of an older country. What initially caught my attention was that my Grandma shared a pamphlet with me. This told me that Democracy New Zealand was dropping pamphlets in elderly-dominated suburbs who were seen as potential voters who are least likely to be aware of the online communities from which Democracy New Zealand emerged (Zehring & Domahidi, 2023).

However, by far the most impactful political outcome of the Wellington Protest was the effect it had on New Zealand First. Winston Peters – as New Zealand’s perennial populist (Oldfield & Veen, 2023; Subedi et al., 2023) – being at the time out of Parliament, the significant political energy of an unrepresented voter base presented a political opportunity. By September 2023, reporting was emerging of an effective (and unannounced) alliance between New Zealand First and Voices for Freedom (VFF). Vance (2023) outlined the close relationship that VFF and New Zealand First had by this point via Glenn Inwood, (who worked as an intermediary during the Wellington Protest, speaking with ACT Leader David Seymour) a VFF affiliate and friend of New Zealand First MP Shane Jones. Inwood’s role at this point involved reaching out to VFF allies and encouraging them to vote for New Zealand First as their best chance of gaining constituency in Parliament, informing followers on Telegram that he was working behind the scenes. Inwood called Peter’s meeting with the Wellington Protest, a movement that included former doctors who claimed the vaccine made

people magnetic, as his ‘Come to Jesus moment’ (Vance, 2023). Inwood is further allied not just with the Wellington Protest’s anti-vaccine mandate, but also the far-right Resistance Kiwi website which he runs, led astro-turfing campaigns for Tobacco and Japanese Whaling, and was co-founder of Democracy New Zealand. Inwood is not just a conspiracist to be dismissed. Rather, he is an experienced political operator, messaging coordinator, and an ally of now Deputy Leader of New Zealand First, Shane Jones, to the extent that he hosted him in his own home to meet with 50 other political allies (Vance, 2023).

Yet, that its reason *du jour* – the vaccine mandate – was the result of a once-in-a-hundred-year event is an unspoken factor of the Wellington Protest. By 4 April 2022, vaccine mandates started to be rolled back and the My Vaccine Pass was also disestablished (Whyte, 2022). By 2 July 2022, there were no more mandates anywhere (Maher, 2022). This presented an issue for political communication strategists, such as Inwood, so the far-right in New Zealand, notably New Zealand First, pivoted to attack a new group: Transgender individuals. Identified by scholars as the new target of American-culture war (Higgins, 2023; Jones, 2024), transgender rights were already deeply linked with the same anti-lockdown far-right conspiracists as early as March 2020 (Curley et al., 2022). Today, trans rights are under attack globally, including here in New Zealand. A policy to strip public funding of any sporting body that does not exclude transgender women and provide single sex bathrooms, complete with penalties for using the ‘wrong’ one (New Zealand First, 2023), was initially announced in August 2023. After being rejected by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, this policy has reemerged in May 2024 as a Members Bill regarding penalties for bathroom use and mandating single sex provision of public bathrooms (Peters, 2024). These policies are in line with the growing trend of New Zealand First becoming a major player in legitimising the discourse that surrounds this movement. Recent Press Releases have more in common with the signs from the Wellington Protest than governing politics. One Press Release called a

news reporter ‘Leftie shill’ (Peters, 2024) and opinionated fake news, in line with signs during the Wellington Protest such as Figure 60: *MEDIA IS GOVT CONTROLLED SUSTAINED PROPOGANDA* and Figure 154: *NEWS IS CORRUPT!! BULLSHIT!!*.

Whilst this may seem like a long bow to draw, there is a clear throughline between Inwood, who was deeply involved in the Wellington Protest as part of VFF and Democracy New Zealand, having at least *some* influence over a political party that has rapidly changed its policy to appeal to those who emerged as part of the broad movement of the Wellington Protest, or agreed with discriminating against the most up-to-date outgroup in vogue for fascist groups around the world (Curley et al., 2022). Paxton (1998) describes the means to power of fascism as the necessary co-option of the right by tempting them with their support base to consolidate power. New Zealand First is a party that is clearly not fascist in any sense, but by presenting themselves as the party that legitimises the language of the burgeoning fascist movement that formed the Wellington Protest, those groups believe that they now have a political party as part of the ruling government who will represent their interests (Vance, 2023). New Zealand First may strongly disagree with this conclusion, but the reality is that to those who are part of the transnational anti-government, fascist movement, they believe that New Zealand First represent *them*.

Conclusion

My original research question was, simply, what political movement(s) did the signs at the Wellington Protest represent? That question led me to a very different problem than I first envisaged. I had a visceral experience of combing through hundreds of unique signs, getting an inductive, almost para-social feel for the messaging of the protest and how it evolved in phases. My initial inductive categories of personal freedom, appeal to emotion, group solidarity, provocative, anti-politics, and conspiracy were in need of a theoretical, explanatory framework. It was the presence of raw emotion and researching theories of social-change

movements that led me to chance upon Paxton (1998), a seminal piece of research that formed my Rosetta Stone. Paxton gave me insight into double-speak and the deliberately fractured nature of fascist language. During my research, a picture started to emerge: not only did any one sign not tell the whole story, but neither could the foundational scholars on fascism. The technological tool of social media had turbocharged transnational connections to the point that a fascist movement can be – and already is – franchised, readily translated into local language and cultural slang, and ready for export around the world in time to capitalise on a pandemic crisis.

My overall findings were clear: The Wellington Protest is best understood as the early stage of a fascist movement, advocating political violence, a rebirth of the State in its image, and – enabled by technological progress – completely dedicated to their virtual leader of Donald Trump. As a group, the Wellington Protest had significant transnational connections and, as the most recent of a wave of similar protests globally, it came equipped with proven and tested slogans and methods, often word-for-word from identical protests even years earlier (Fominaya, 2024). Most worryingly, the forces behind the Wellington Protest have not dissipated or disappeared with the waning of the pandemic itself as some individuals and groups have become more overtly involved in New Zealand politics. This includes a propaganda radio show guested by sitting Cabinet members and possible policy ties to a party in Government as of 2024 (Vance, 2023).

Worryingly, the underlying political mood in New Zealand is not a protective factor against a fascist movement, rather, it is an enabling one, with over half of Kiwis supporting the form of radical political change that the Wellington Protest advocated. In light of these findings, I believe that it is urgent for policymakers, security scholars, and security practitioners to have a mature political conversation about what a fascist political movement *should and does* look like in 2024. We should not expect such a movement to be confined by

national borders, national politics, or national identity any more than any other aspect of our lives are, be that consumption of overseas goods, international media engagement, or social media-enabled transnational friendships. I urge more critique and analysis from academics of government policy that erodes public trust and increases inequality, sending people into the populist arms of the radical change that fascism offers. I urge security practitioners to ensure they are up to date with current understandings of fascism, what it looks like, and the potential use of political violence to ensure New Zealanders are safe in their day-to-day lives. I urge security studies in general to be the voice of protection for the LGBTQI+ community that has already become the next target for fascist groups in New Zealand, especially given the trend of New Zealand to lag behind real-world outcomes of fascist movements, which have already escalated overseas to violence.

Overall, I hope my findings provide use not just to various communities in New Zealand, but also contemporary fascism scholars overseas who are trying to tackle the same issues. I hope that this research project is able to link previously disparate research on language, ideology, and the ability of technological tools, including social media, that enable the evolution of anti-democratic social movements such as fascism. My hope is that this project's contribution to the academic literature allows understanding of fascism and, in some small way, reduces the opportunities for this new, franchised model of fascism to capitalise on the current, unstable global environment.

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Figures

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_9s-Sh56qKO10ZccsMFAdUv5cyBF_QF0?usp=sharing

Figure 1

FREEDOM FIGHTER



Figure 2

NZ ANTHEM HEAR OUR VOICES



Figure 3

YOU SERVE US



Figure 4

WE are ALL EQUAL IN RANK. It is THE ONE'S WHO DECIDE. FOR THEN WE ARE NOT

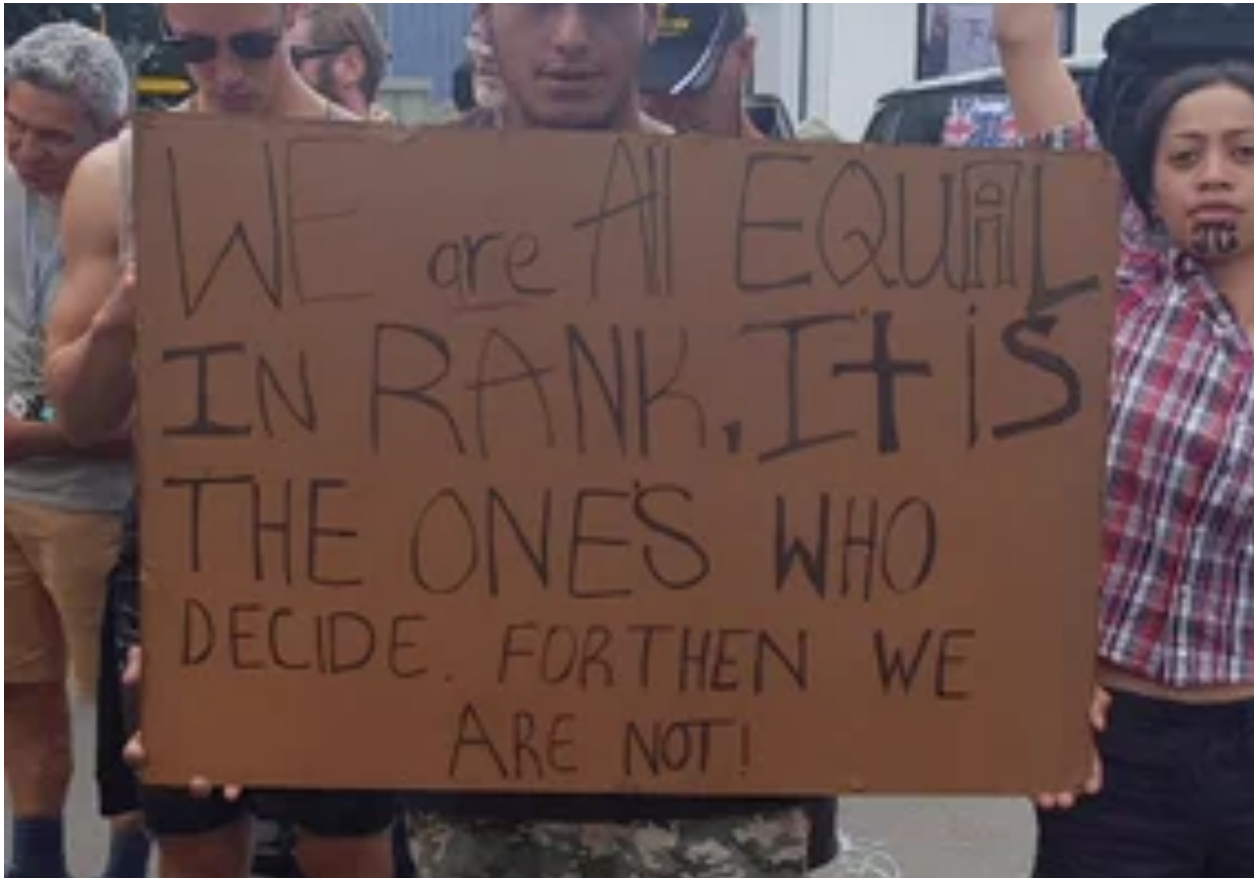


Figure 5

TWO CLASSES OF KIWIS. OK WITH THAT?



Figure 6

I'm not a Racist I'm not an activist I AM A KIWI!!



Figure 7

TOOT FOR FARMERS!



Figure 8

SIEG HEIL ARDERN OUR MIGHTY FUHRER Man you're good-Setting us against eachother;- Right from the playbook!



Figure 9

THEY ARE WILLING TO TEAR SOCIETY APART TO JAB ALMOST EVERYONE. WILL YOU LET THEM SUCCEED?

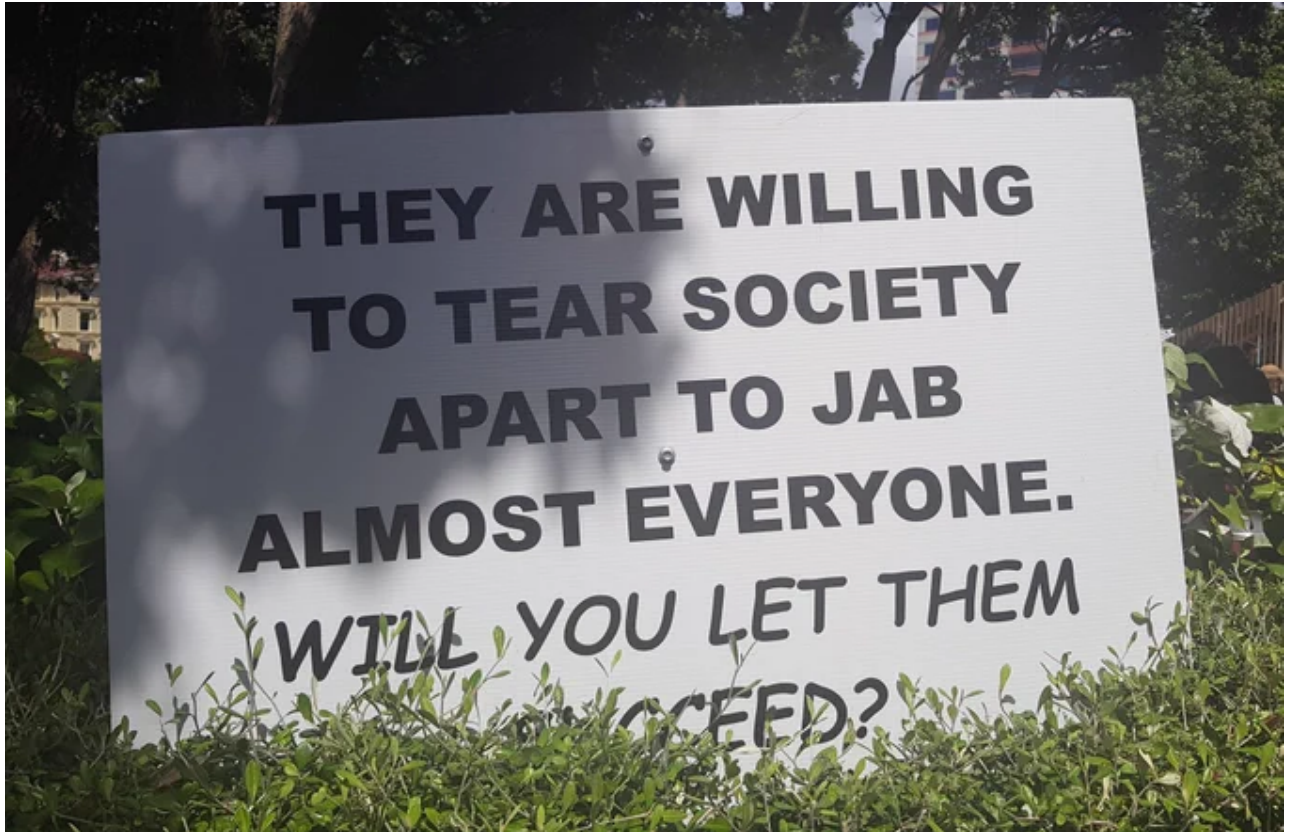


Figure 10

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE IS A SACRED DUTY WHEN THE STATE BECOMES LAWLESS

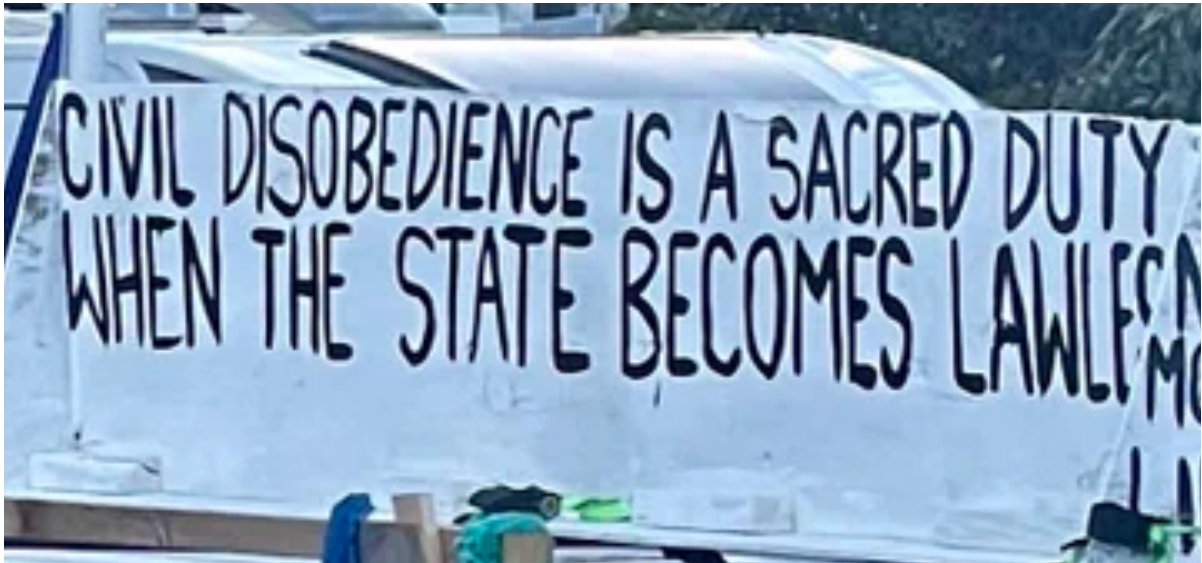


Figure 11

NO to MANDATES NO to the Vax &...

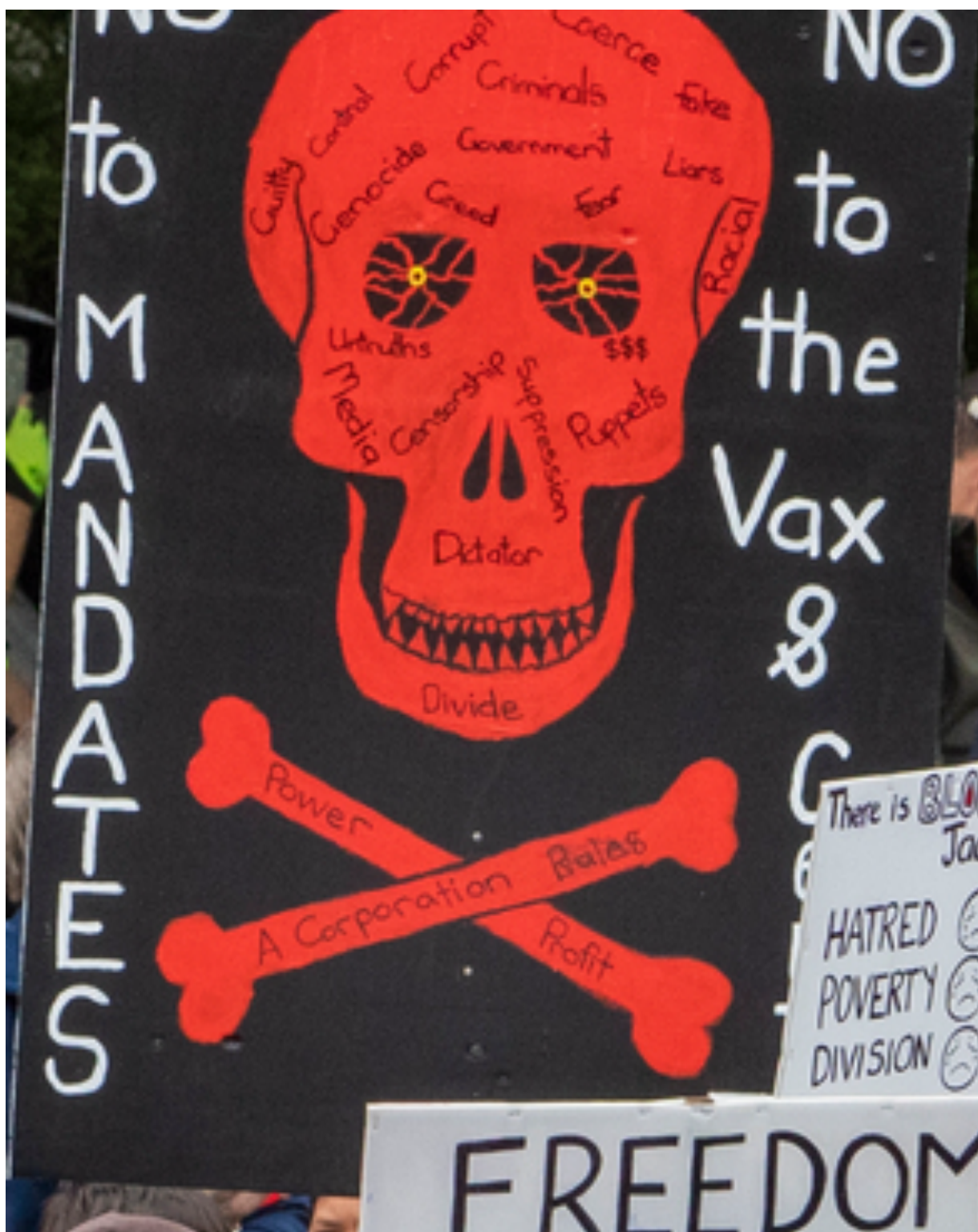


Figure 12

WE ARE MOTHERS HEAR US ROAR!



Figure 13

DOUBLE VAXXED I AM NOT THE MINORITY



Figure 14

*JACINDA KLAUS SCHWAB AND THE GLOBALISTS AGENDA 2030 THE GREAT RESET
DEPOPULATE THE EARTH ONE WORLD GOVERNMENT SOCIAL CREDIT MONETARY
SYSTEM YOU WILL OWN NOTHING NO FREEDOM NO RIGHTS NO PRIVACY NO
LAND MURDERING MAGGOTS*



Figure 15

I'M SORRY YOU HAD TO SHUT YOUR SHOP FOR PROTESTORS BUT I LOST MY JOB & MY HOME



Figure 16

HEALTHY KIDS is NATURAL IMMUNITY RISKY VAX DEADLY!



Figure 17

WE SPEAK FOR ALL TAMARIKI



Figure 18

UNITE 4 FREEDOM WE ♥ TRUCKIES



Figure 19

WE ARE THE PUBLIC TOO



Figure 20

DIFFERENT OPINIONS SAME PRINCIPLE FREEDOM

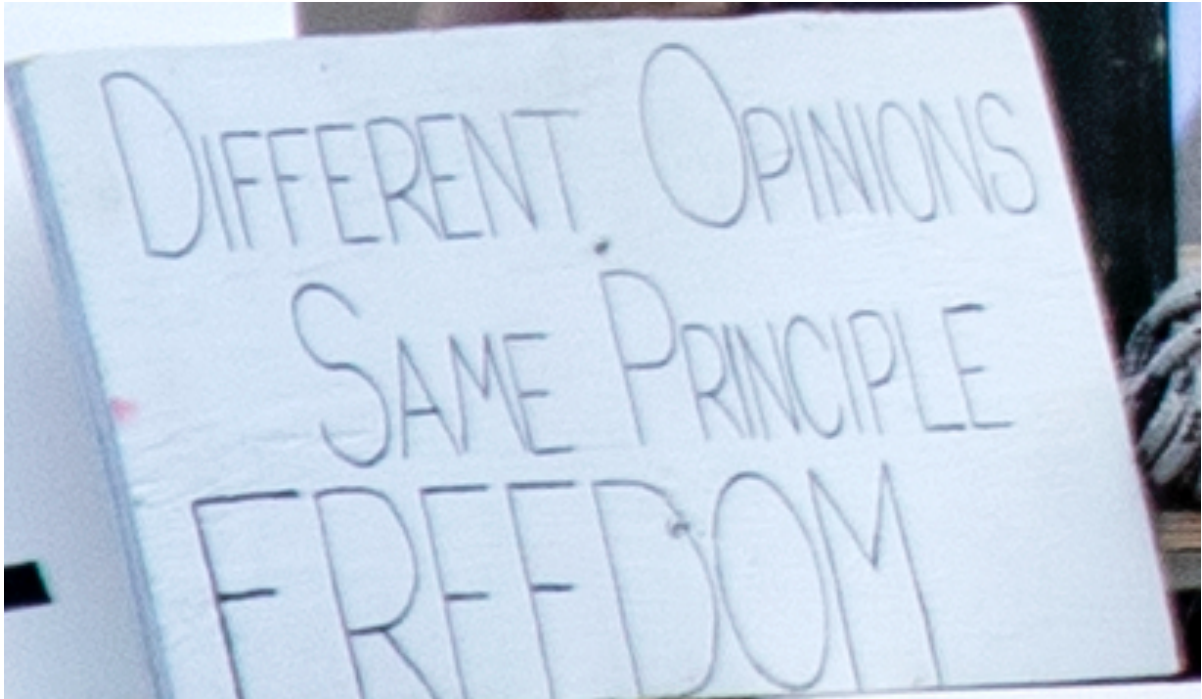


Figure 21*FREEDOM*

Figure 22

IF YOU AREN'T AN ACTIVIST DURING THIS TIME IN HISTORY KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT & GET OUT OF THE WAY OF THOSE OF US WHO ARE FIGHTING YOUR BATTLES AS WELL



Figure 23

WE ARE Q WWGIWGA



Figure 24

CLARKE MIGHT LIKE IT UP THE ASS... BUT WE DON'T



Figure 25

JABCINDA YOUR TAXI IS HERE (a)

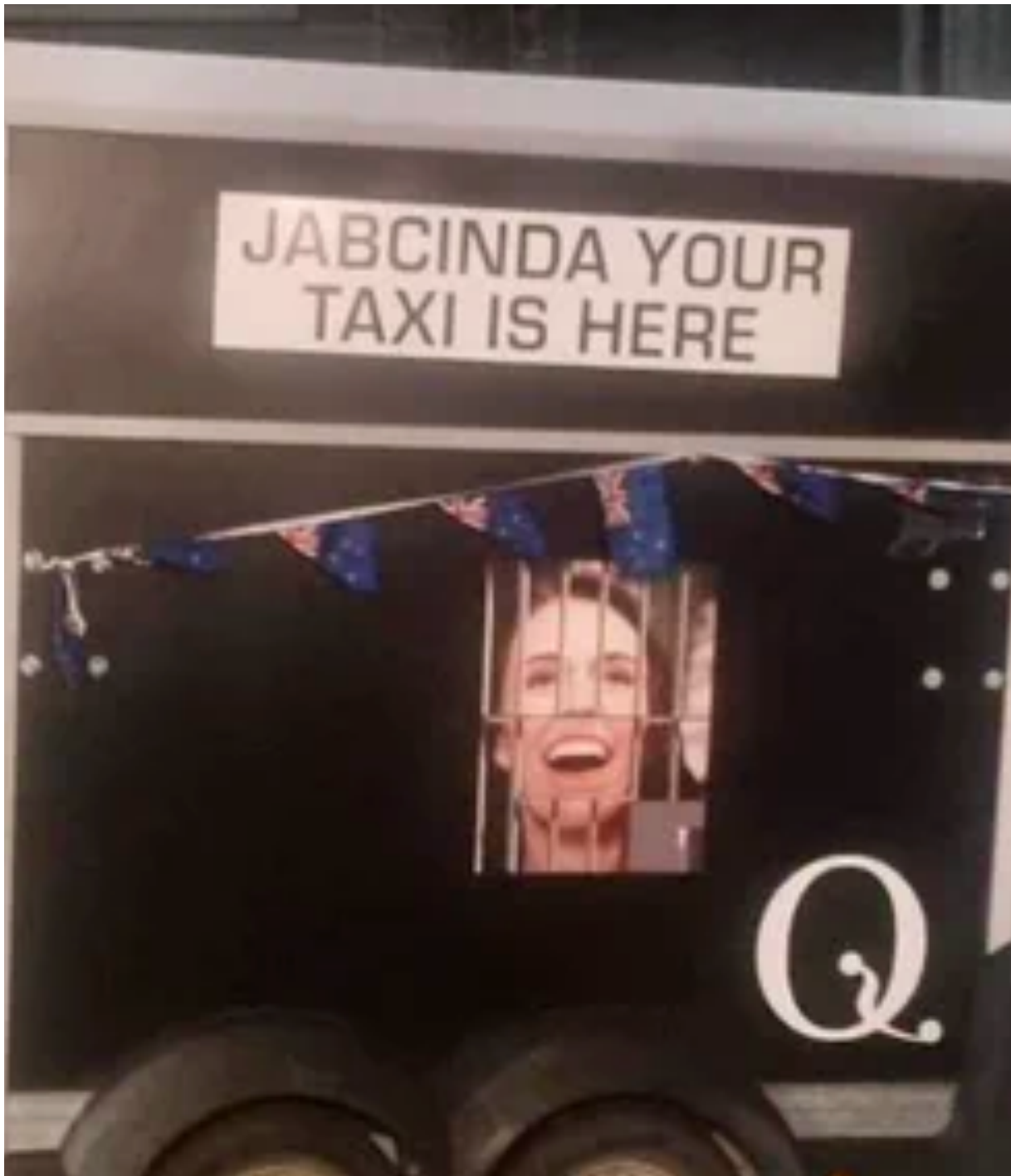


Figure 26

JABCINDA YOUR TAXI IS HERE (b)



Figure 27

TOOT FOR FARMERS!



Figure 28

*WE THE PEOPLE NEED TO UNITE NEIGHBOURS COMMUNITIES GOOD FOLK
STAND: SPEAK*



Figure 29

I STAND FOR THE: TAMARIKI PEOPLE PEACE AND OUR FREEDOM!!!



Figure 30*DO NOT COMPLY*

Figure 31

Freedom of choice

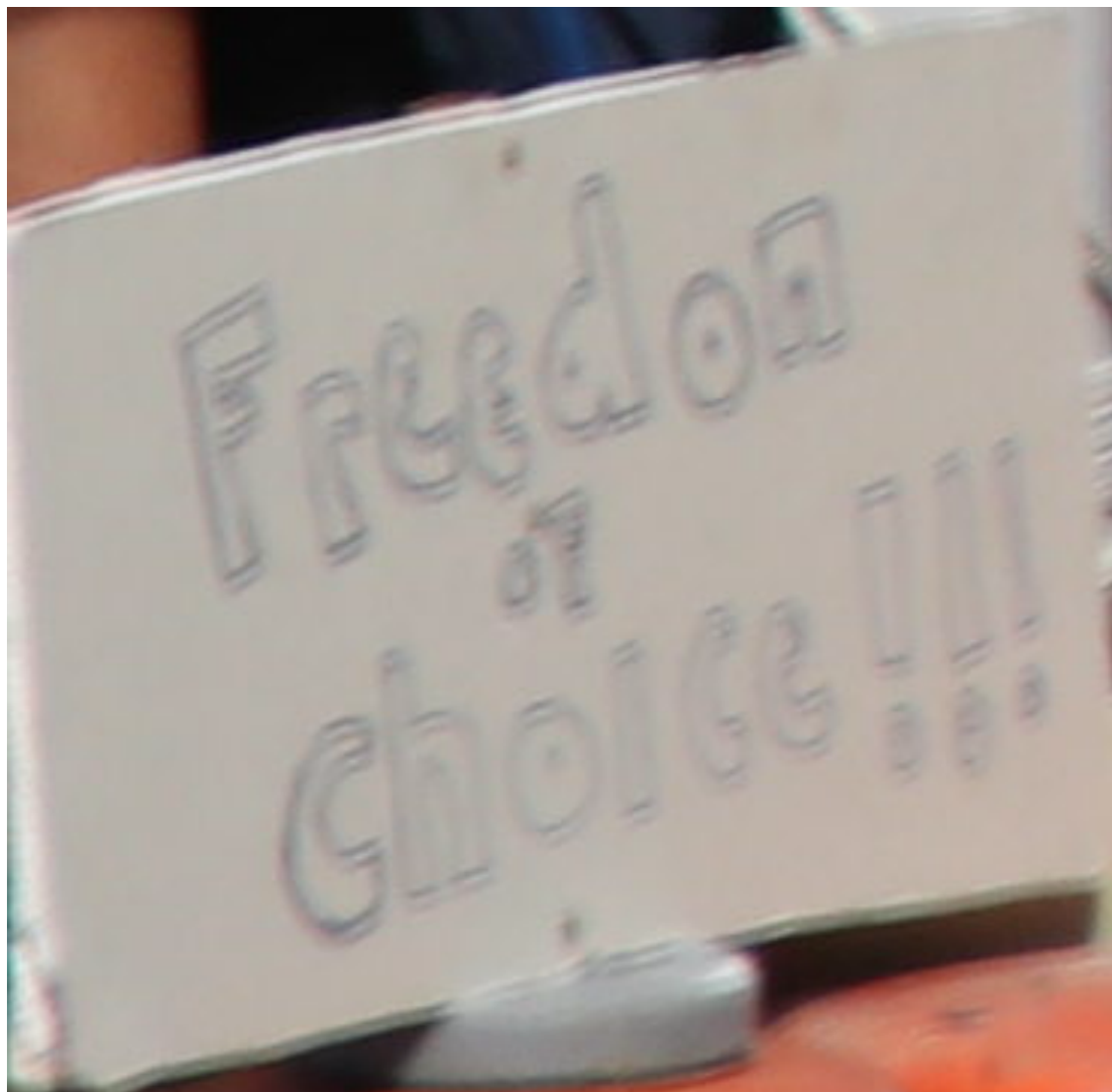


Figure 32

TRUMP Q SENT US



Figure 33

SATAN IS ARDERNS DADDY



Figure 34

*DECLARATION OF MAORI INDEPENDENCE STANDS. MAORI LAWS PRE 1840 ARE
LEGITAMOTE EVEN IF MY SPELLING ANT*



Figure 35

LET PEOPLE WORK



Figure 36

END MANDATES KEEP WORKMATES



Figure 37

THIS IS NOT THE KIWI WAY!



Figure 38

LEAVE OUR KIDS ALONE



Figure 39

HANDS OFF OUR CHILDREN HONK 4 FREEDOM



Figure 40

PLEASE DONT ALLOW THEM TO POISON ♥ YOUR ♥ TAMARIKI. PROTECT THEM



Figure 41

My MuM can't take me to my favourite camp spot, the cinema, the library (I love reading), my sports, the swimming pools. I MiSS Seeing people. It's Not Fair. NZ it's time for change!!!

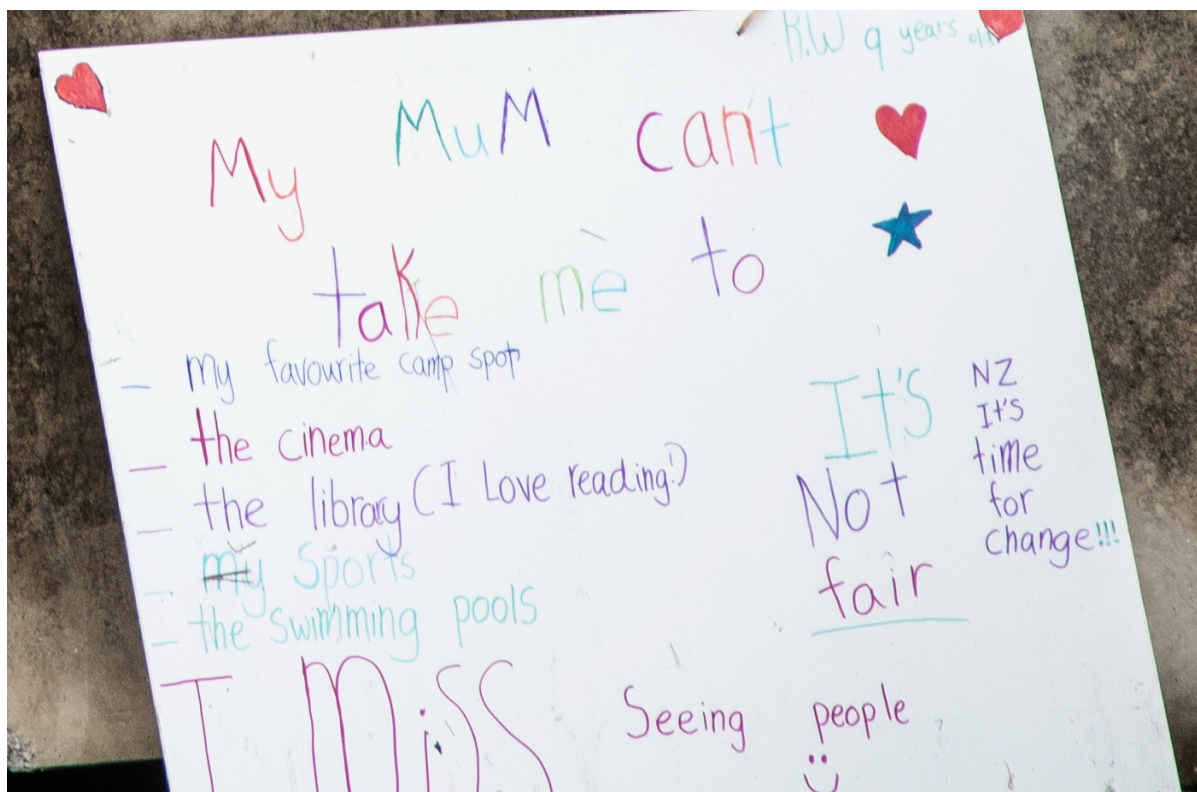


Figure 42

POLICE COMPLICIT WITH ♥ MURDER ♥ Please protect my friends



Figure 43

*WELCOME COME IN PEACE ALCOHOL FREE DRUG FREE KIDS FRIENDLY RESPECT
ALL STAND STRONG SPREAD LOVE BE FREE*



Figure 44

THIS IS A PEACEFUL PROTEST NO MORE VIOLENCE PLEASE POLICE



Figure 45

Stay peaceful Stop Mandates



Figure 46

WE NEVER FLUNG ANY POOP



Figure 47

JABCINDA NUREMBURG CODE IS GOING TO GET YOU!

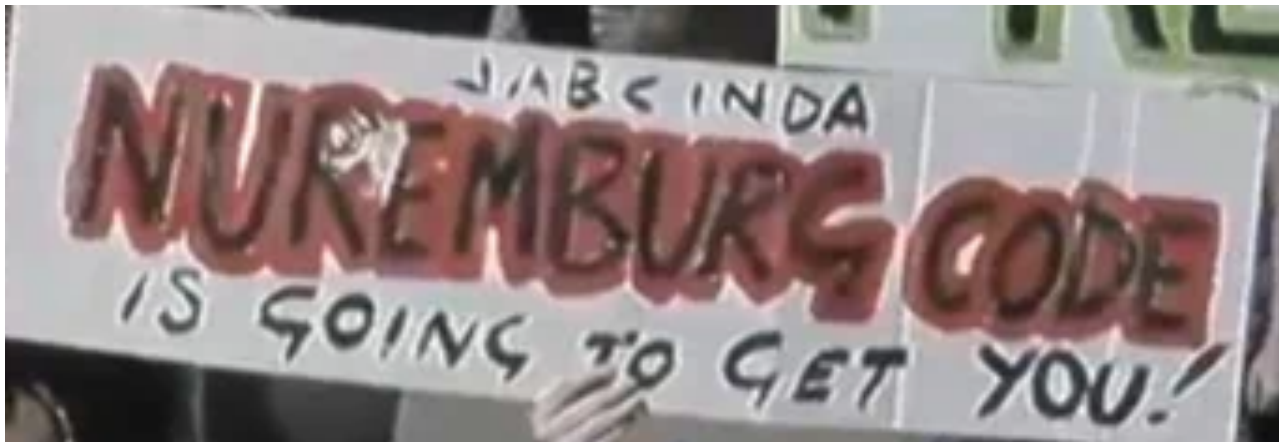


Figure 48

NUREMBERG 2 WILL BE A BLAST Labour Govt

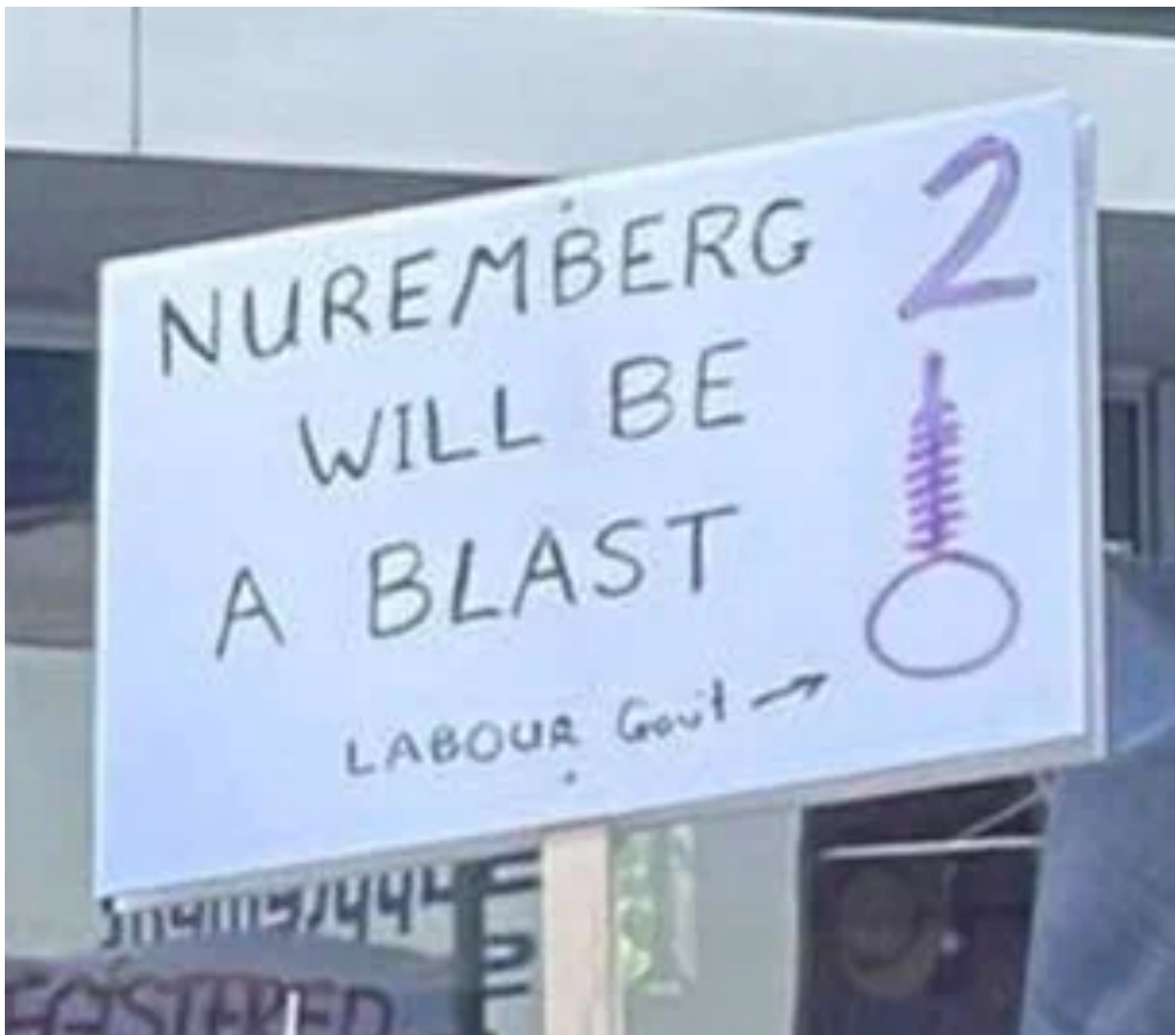


Figure 49*HANG THEM ALL*

Figure 50

HANG 'EM HIGH



Figure 51

New Zealand mass-murderers



Figure 52

THIS IS OUR HOUR THIS IS OUR GALLIPOLI



Figure 53

STALINDA LIEBOUR FUCK OFF



Figure 54

Adolf Ardern



Figure 55

END APARTHEID WE GO HOME

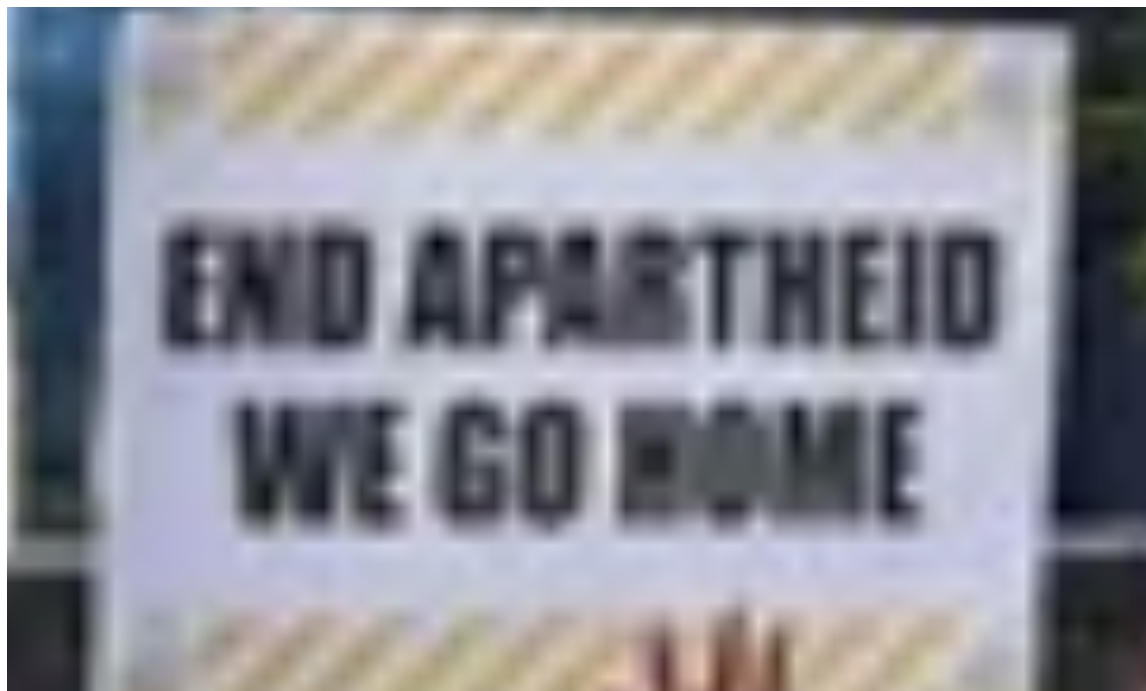


Figure 56

JABCINDA CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY GUILTY!



Figure 57

NZ MEDIA part of GENOCIDAL MURDER



Figure 58

666 → MEDIA



Figure 59

THE MEDIA IS THE VIRUS



Figure 60

MEDIA IS GOVT CONTROLLED SUSTAINED PROPAGANDA



Figure 61

JACINDA BE KIND TALK WITH THE PEOPLE!!

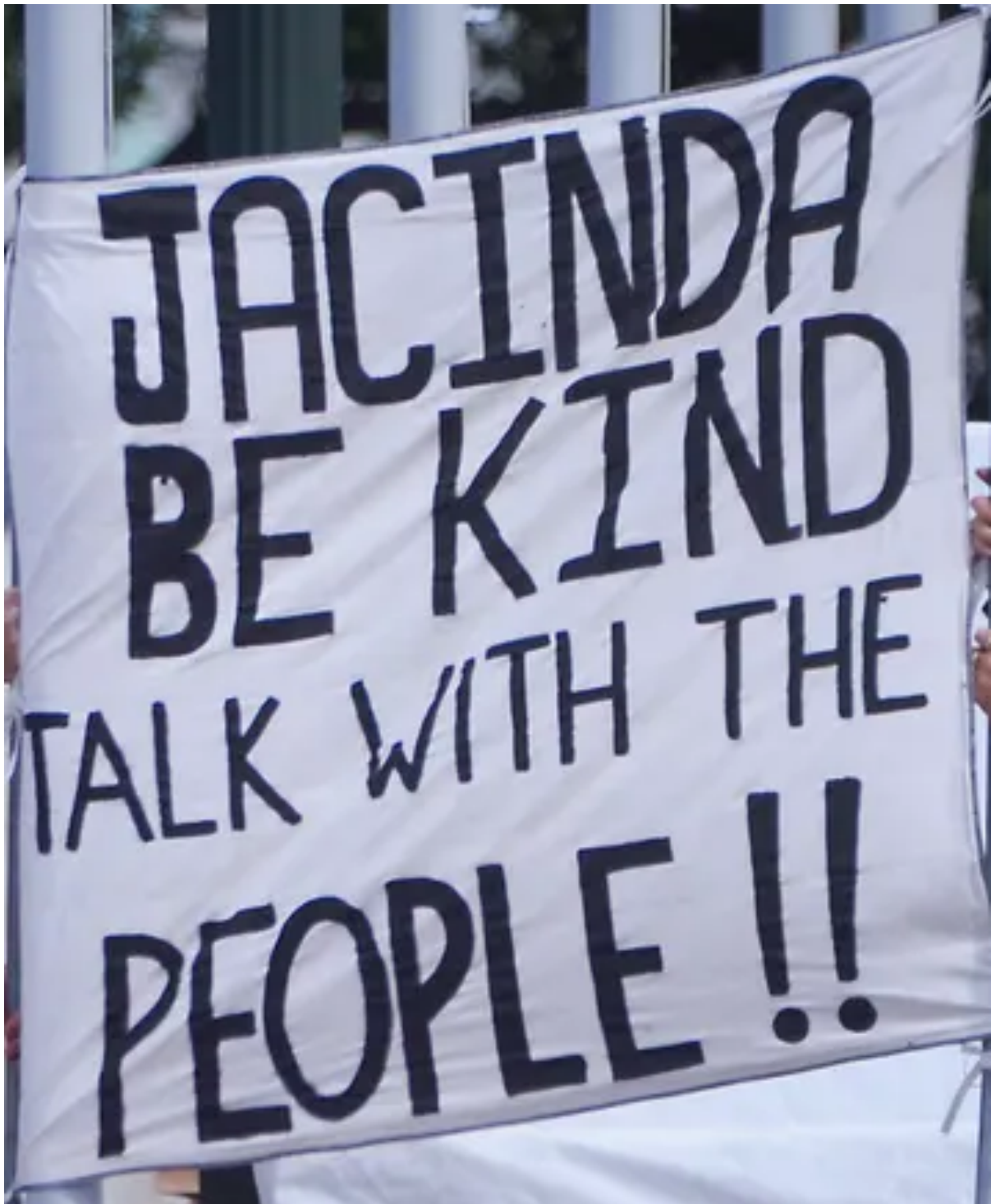


Figure 62

THE ONLY REASON THEY CAN COME FOR YOUR CHILD IS BECAUSE YOU SUBMITTED FIRST

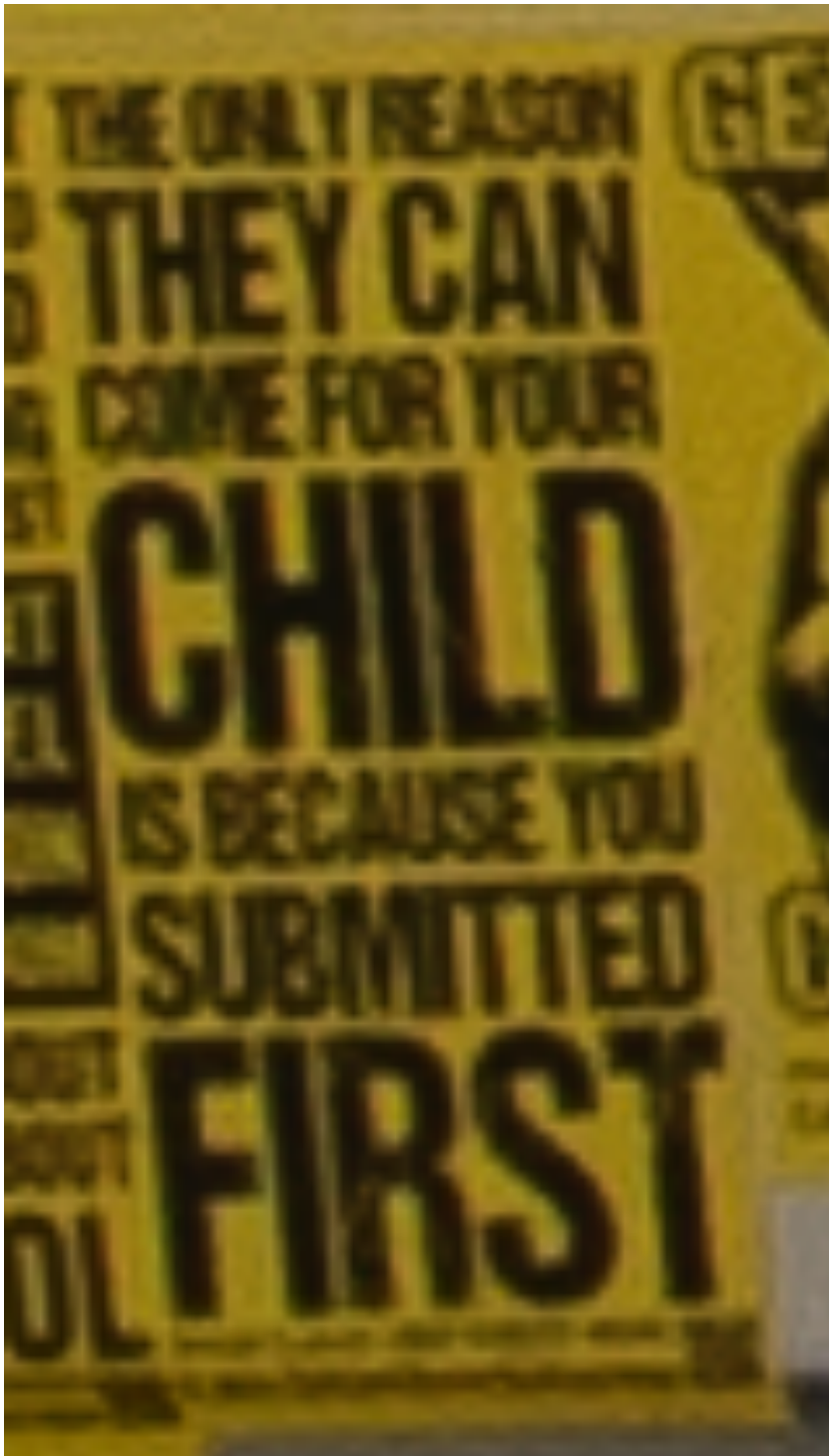


Figure 63

I'D RATHER DIE ON MY FEET THAN LIVE ON MY KNEES

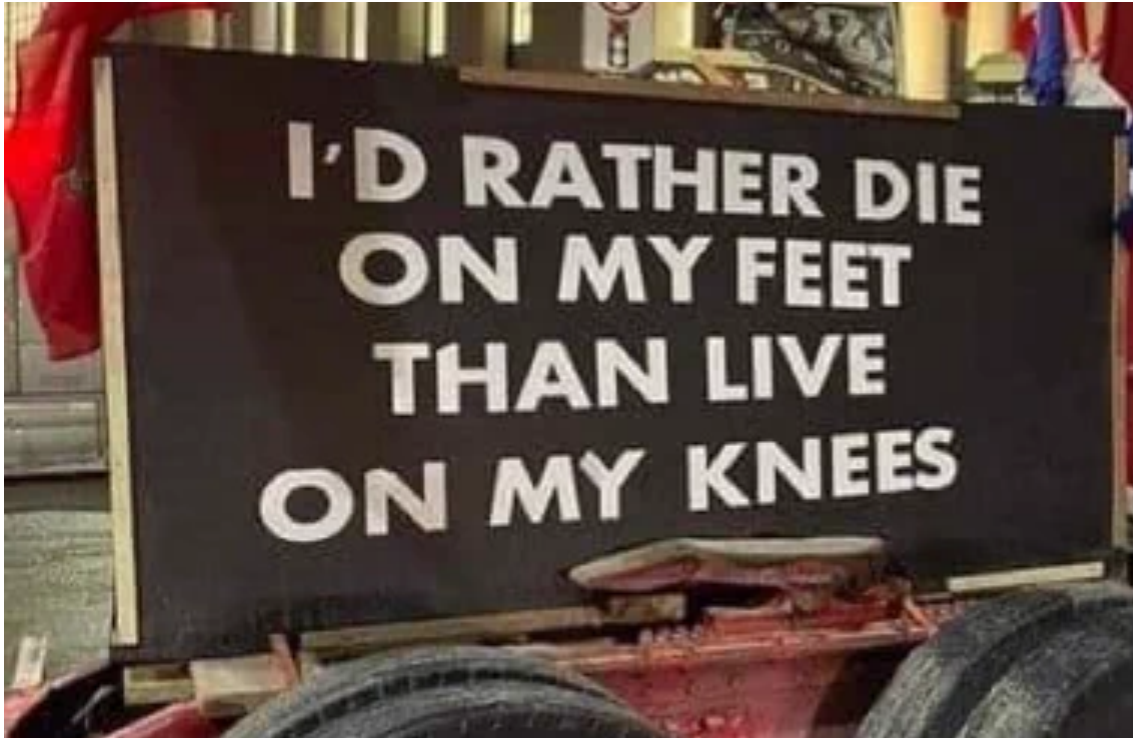


Figure 64

YOU CAN'T CATCH A VIRUS



Figure 65

HEALTHY KIDS is NATURAL IMMUNITY RISKY VAX DEADLY!



Figure 66

Natural Immunity or Natural Selection??

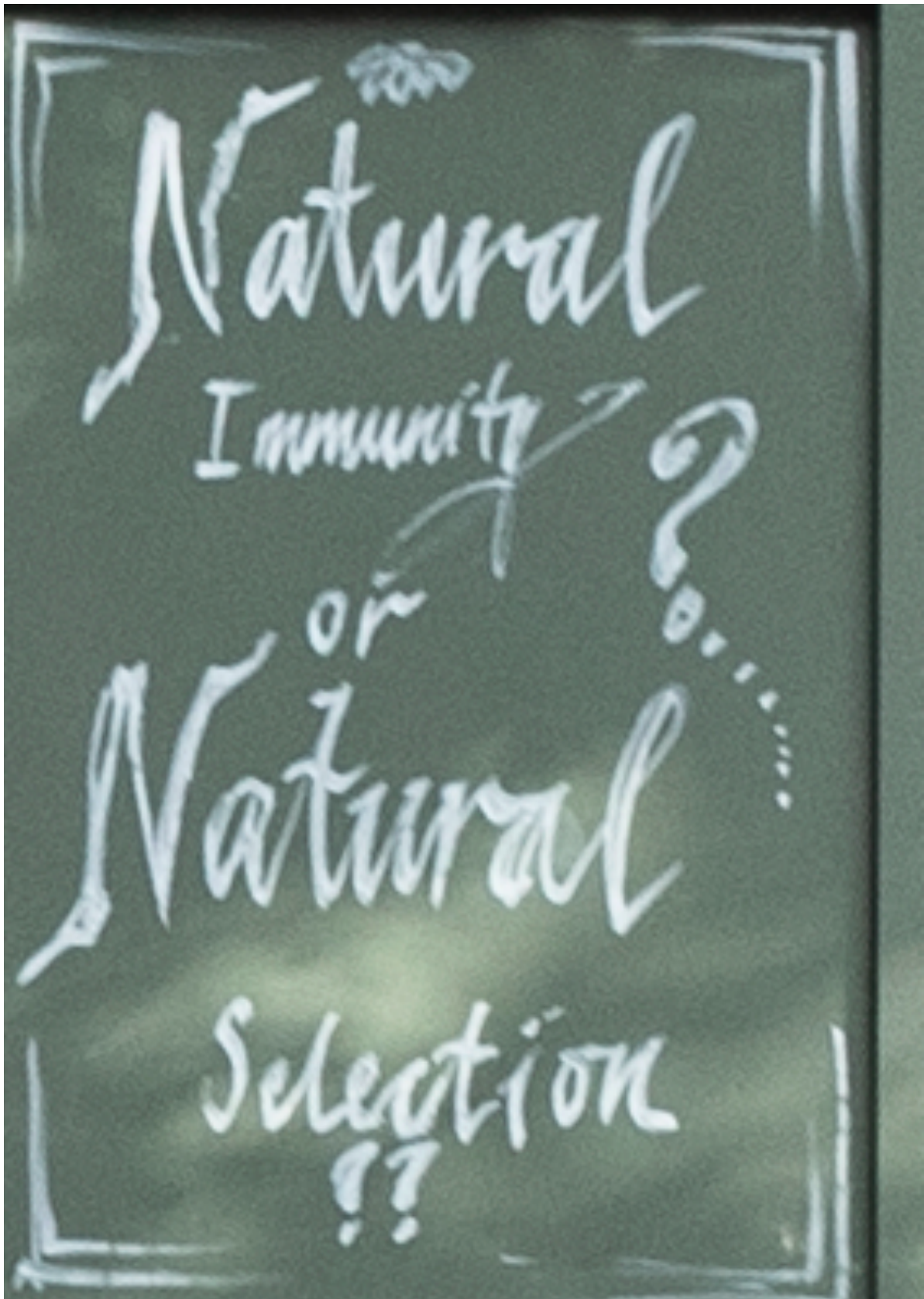


Figure 67

NATURAL IMMUNITY 99.6% EFFECTIVE!!

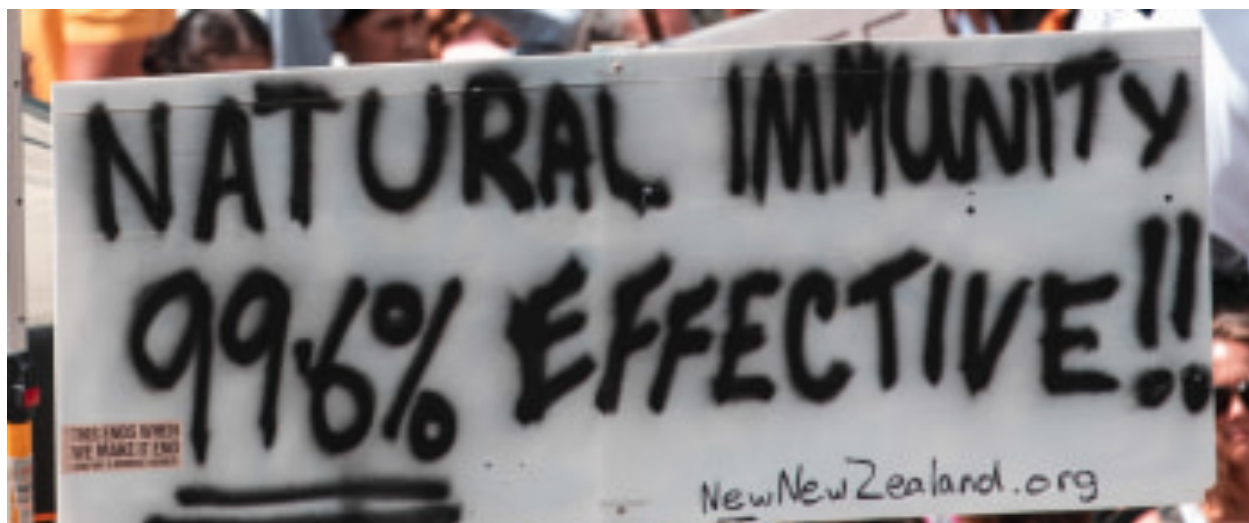


Figure 68

DELTA OMICRON → MEDIA CONTROL



Figure 69

ONE MILLION KIWIS ARE NOT JABBED



Figure 70

POLITICAL LANGUAGE IS DESIGNED TO MAKE LIES SOUND TRUTHFUL!



Figure 71

NUREMBERG TRIAL WILL HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE



Figure 72

REMEMBER You are never too important to be hanged for TREASON!



Figure 73

AT NO POINT IN HISTORY HAVE THE PEOPLE FORCING OTHERS INTO COMPLIANCE BEEN THE GOOD GUYS



Figure 74

Police State?



Figure 75

I WAS JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS



Figure 76

PASSPORTS + CERTIFICATES = APARTHEID



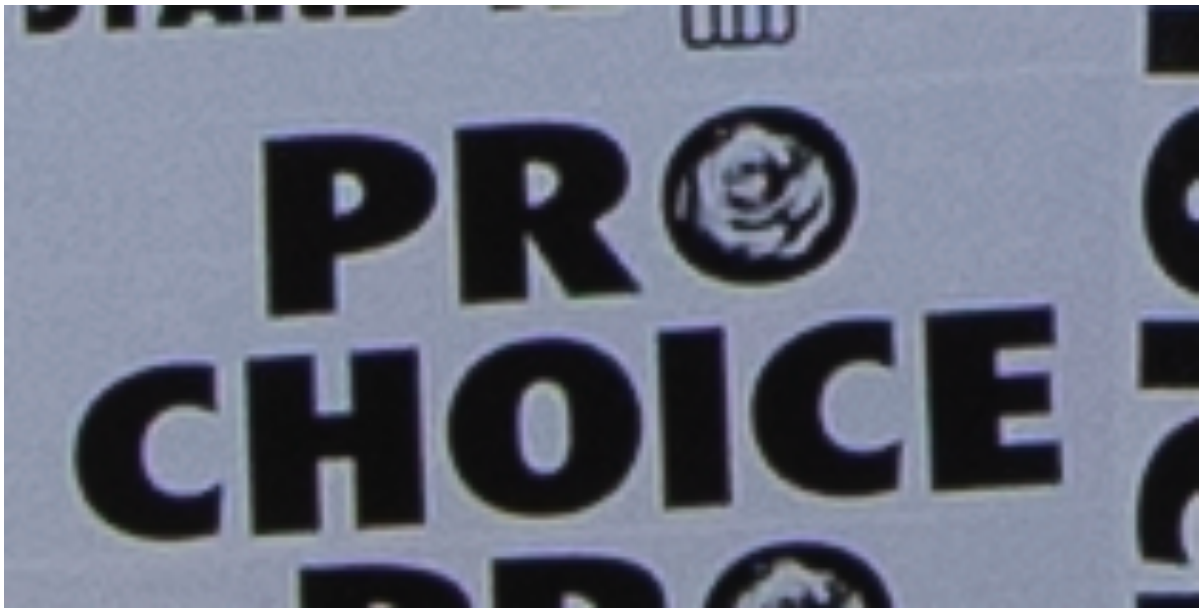
Figure 77*PRO CHOICE*

Figure 78

I OPPOSE FORCED INJECTIONS

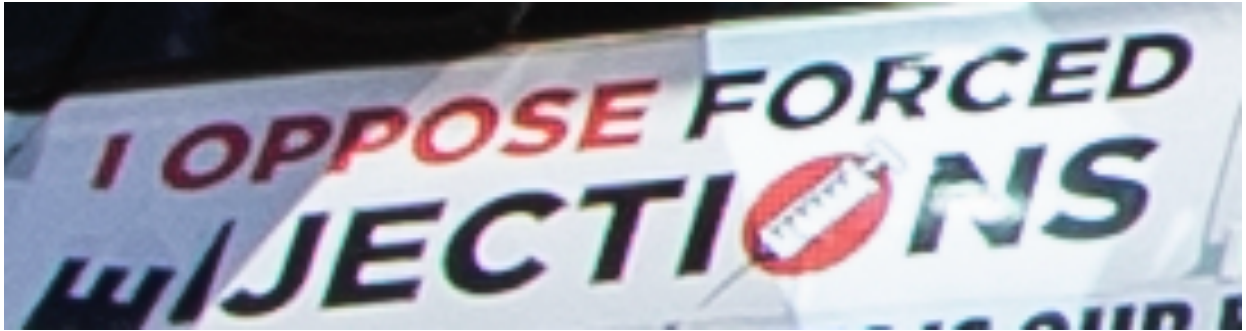


Figure 79

ONE MILLION KIWIS ARE NOT JABBED



Figure 80

IT'S A POLITICAL OPERATION COVID 19 IS STATE TERRORISM



Figure 81

DON'T LET FASCISM COME BACK IN FASHION



Figure 82

*WE THE PEOPLE NEED TO UNITE NEIGHBOURS COMMUNITIES GOOD FOLK
STAND: SPEAK*



Figure 83

UNITED WE STAND DIVIDED WE FALL



Figure 84

PLEASE HELP US STOP JEW CINDA



Figure 85

MAGA MAKE ARDERN GO AWAY

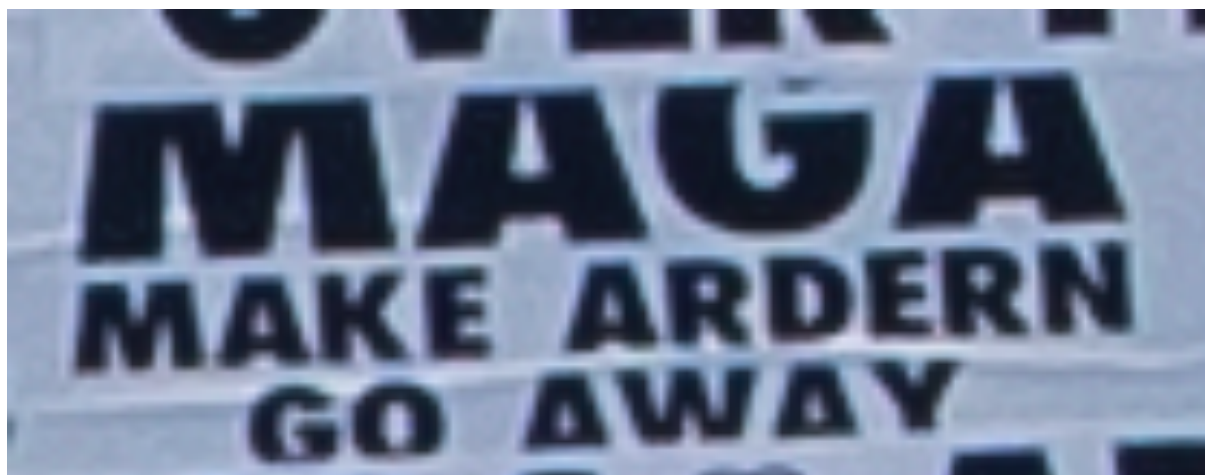


Figure 86

TU KOTAHI TATOU STAND AS ONE



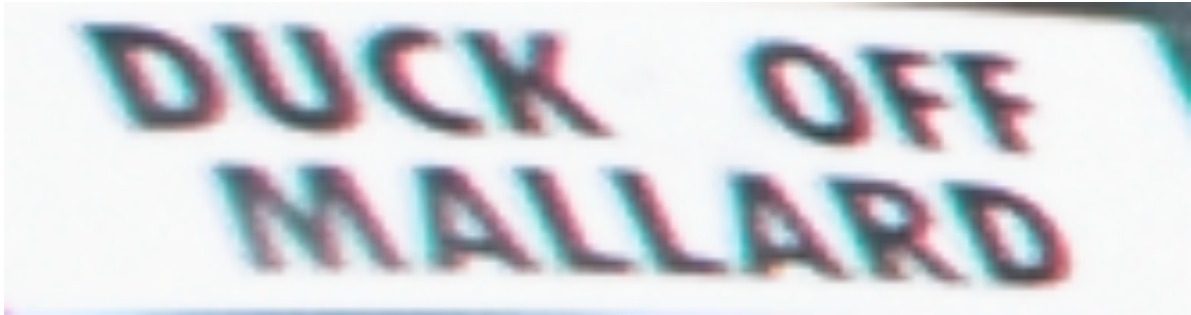
Figure 87*DUCK OFF MALLARD*

Figure 88

BREAKING NEWS! BREATHING FRESH AIR IS NOT GOING TO KILL YOU (BUT THE EXPERIMENTAL VACCINE MIGHT)

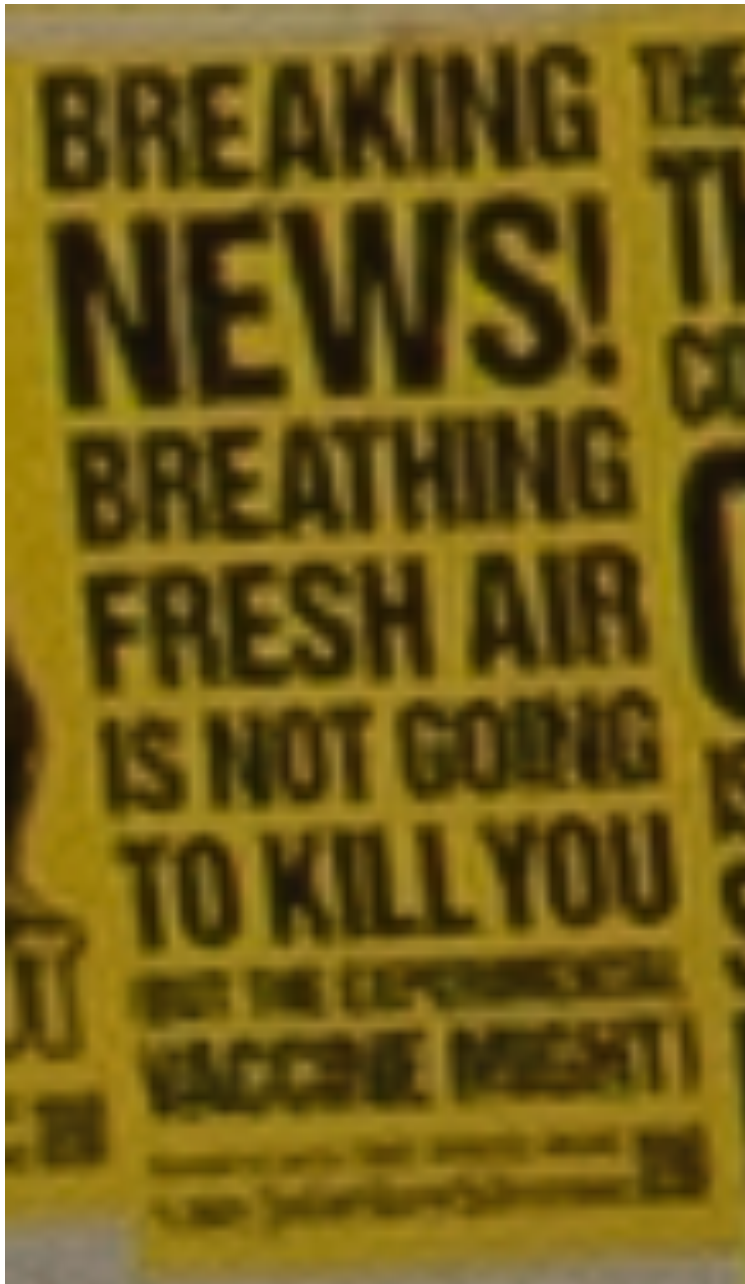


Figure 89

GET YOUR CLOTSHOT



Figure 90

I got my CLOT SHOT!



Figure 91*DR EVIL*

Figure 92

HEALTH PASSPORT PLEASE



Figure 93

CHILDREN ARE FIFTY TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE FROM THE VACCINE THAN FROM COVID-19



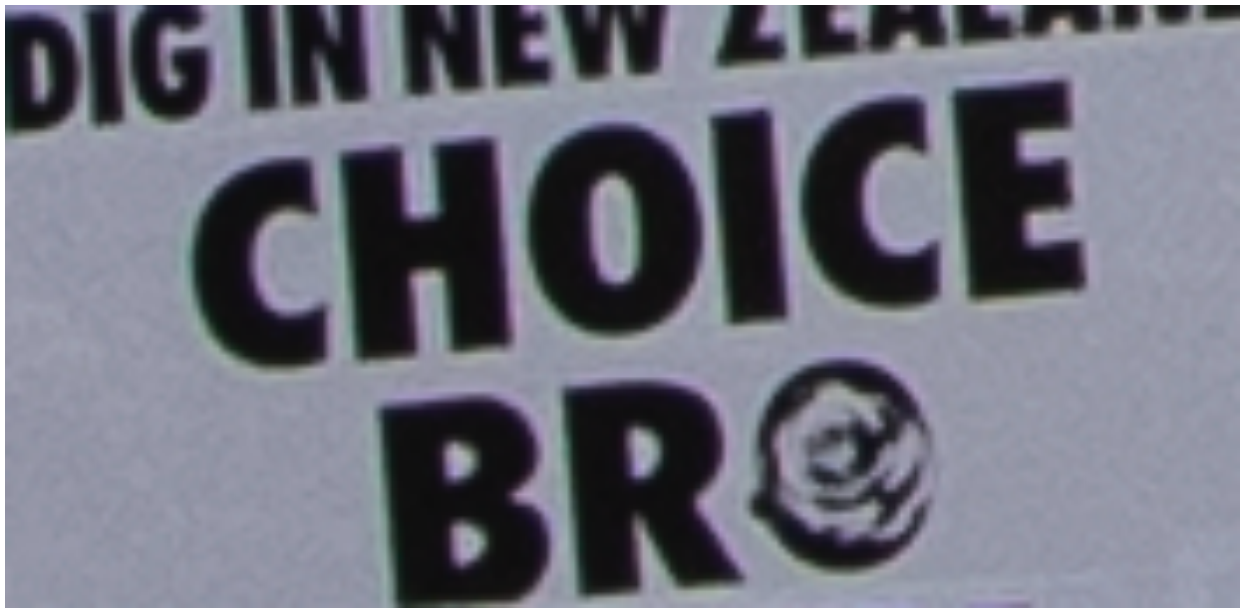
Figure 94*CHOICE BRO*

Figure 95

PAPERS PLEASE! VACCINE PASSPORT



Figure 96

IS THIS THE FUTURE YOU WANT FOR YOUR KIDS?

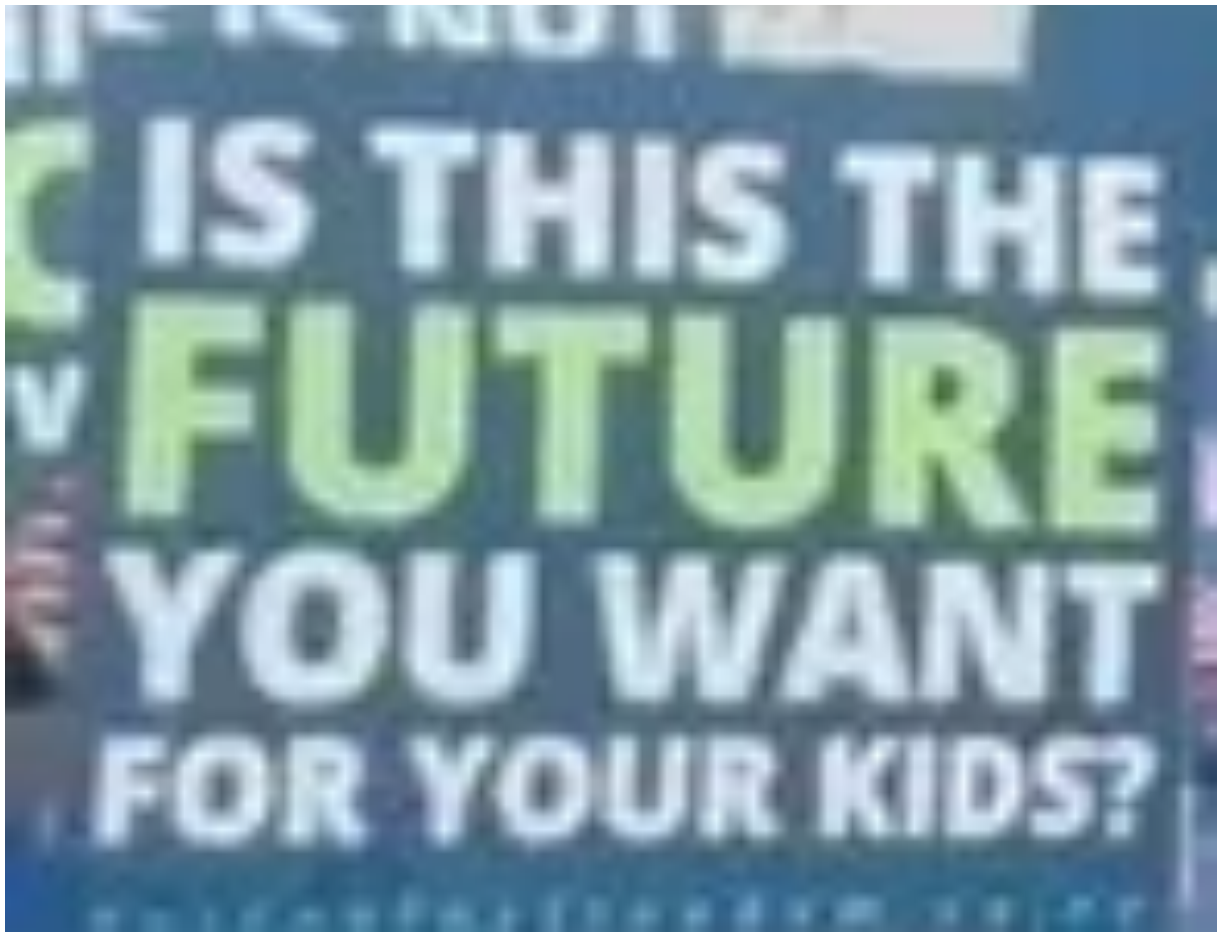


Figure 97

CLOT SHOT YEAH NAH!



Figure 98

PROTECT YOUR WHĀNAU SAY NO TO THE VAX



Figure 99

WE STAND WITH WELLINGTON!



Figure 100

JACINDA IS OUT OF CONTROL!



Figure 101

TRUMP MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!



Figure 102

Let's Go Brandern



Figure 103

I AM NOT YOUR EXPERIMENT

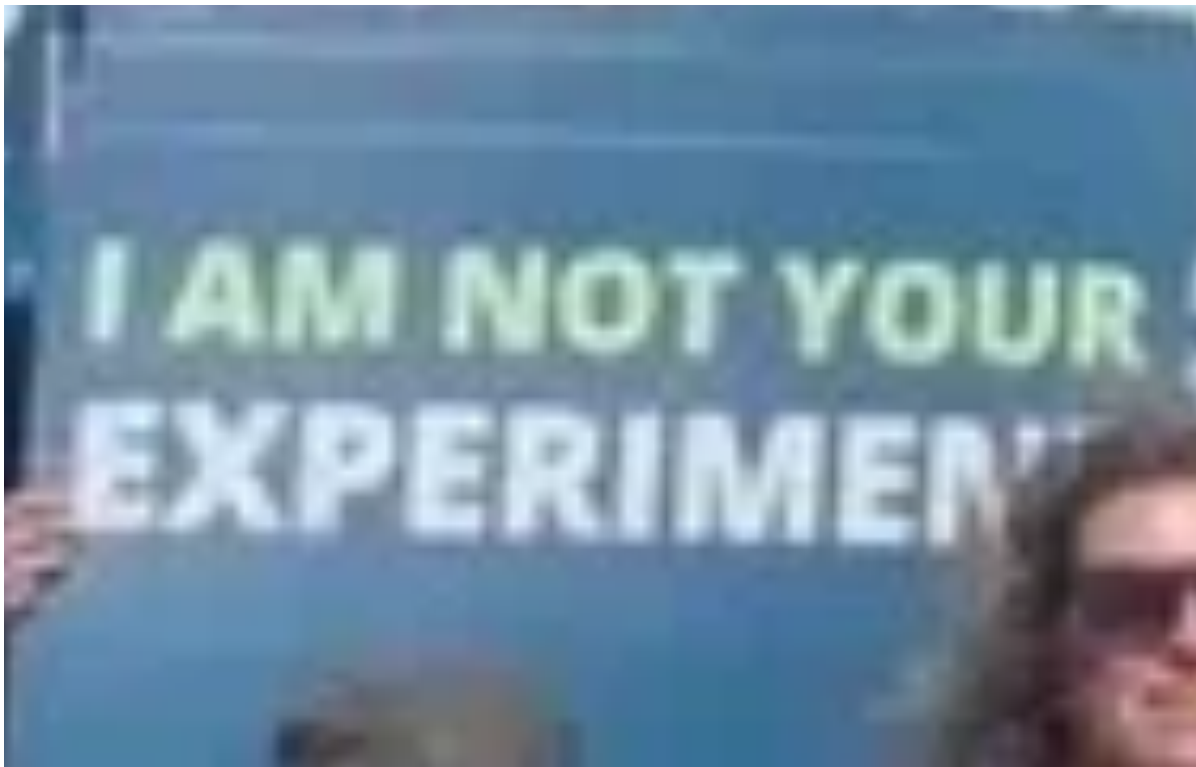


Figure 104

UNVAXXED LIVES MATTER

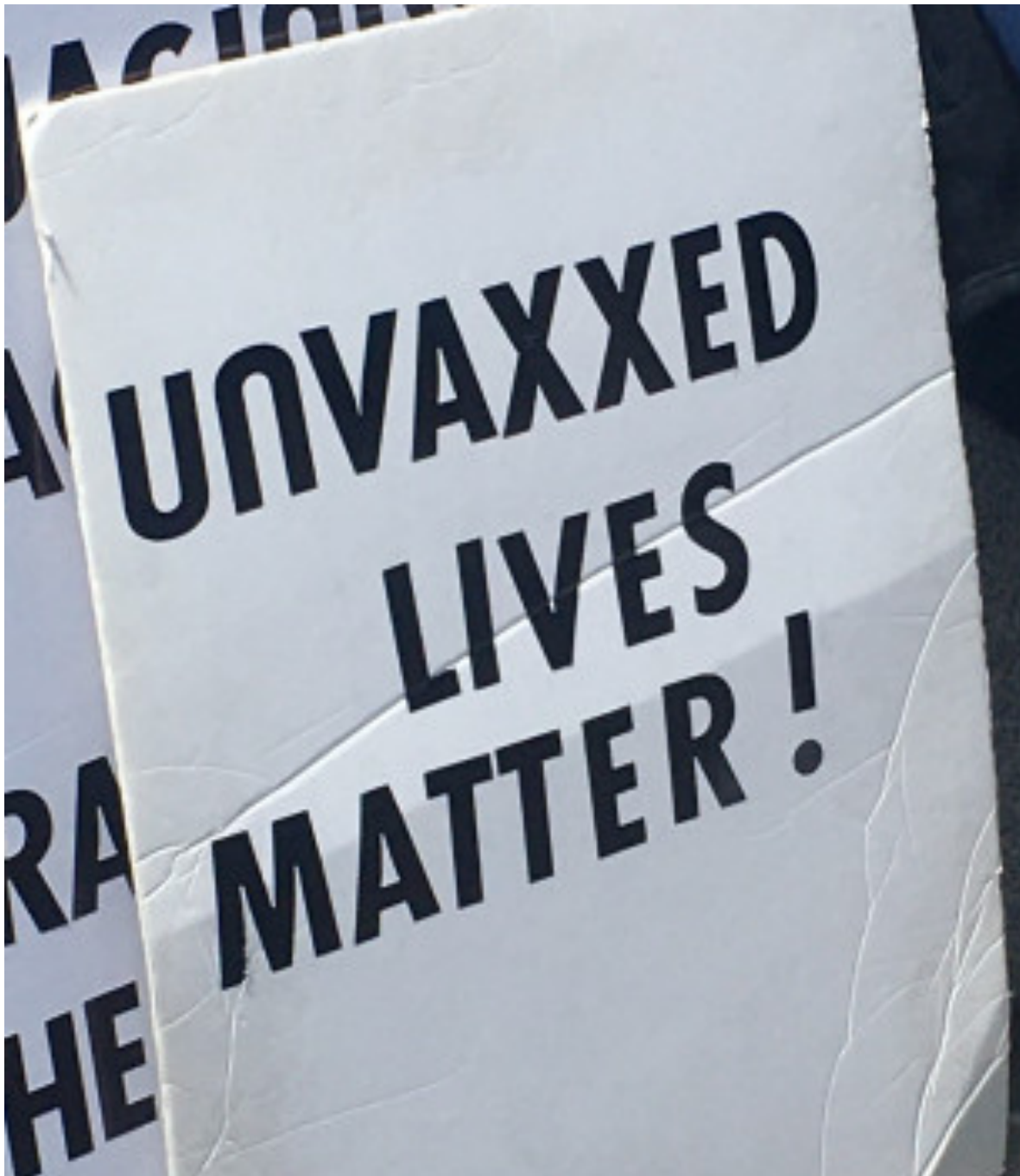


Figure 105

MAGA MAKE ARDERN GO AWAY



Figure 106

"Your single source of truth". Yeah right.



Figure 107

FEAR IS THE REAL VIRUS



Figure 108

WHAT IF THE GOVERNMENT WAS LYING?? WAKE UP NEW ZEALAND



Figure 109

LEST WE FORGET THEY FOUGHT FOR OUR FREEDOM



Figure 110

GRANDPA FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM FROM DICTATORS LIKE JACINDA

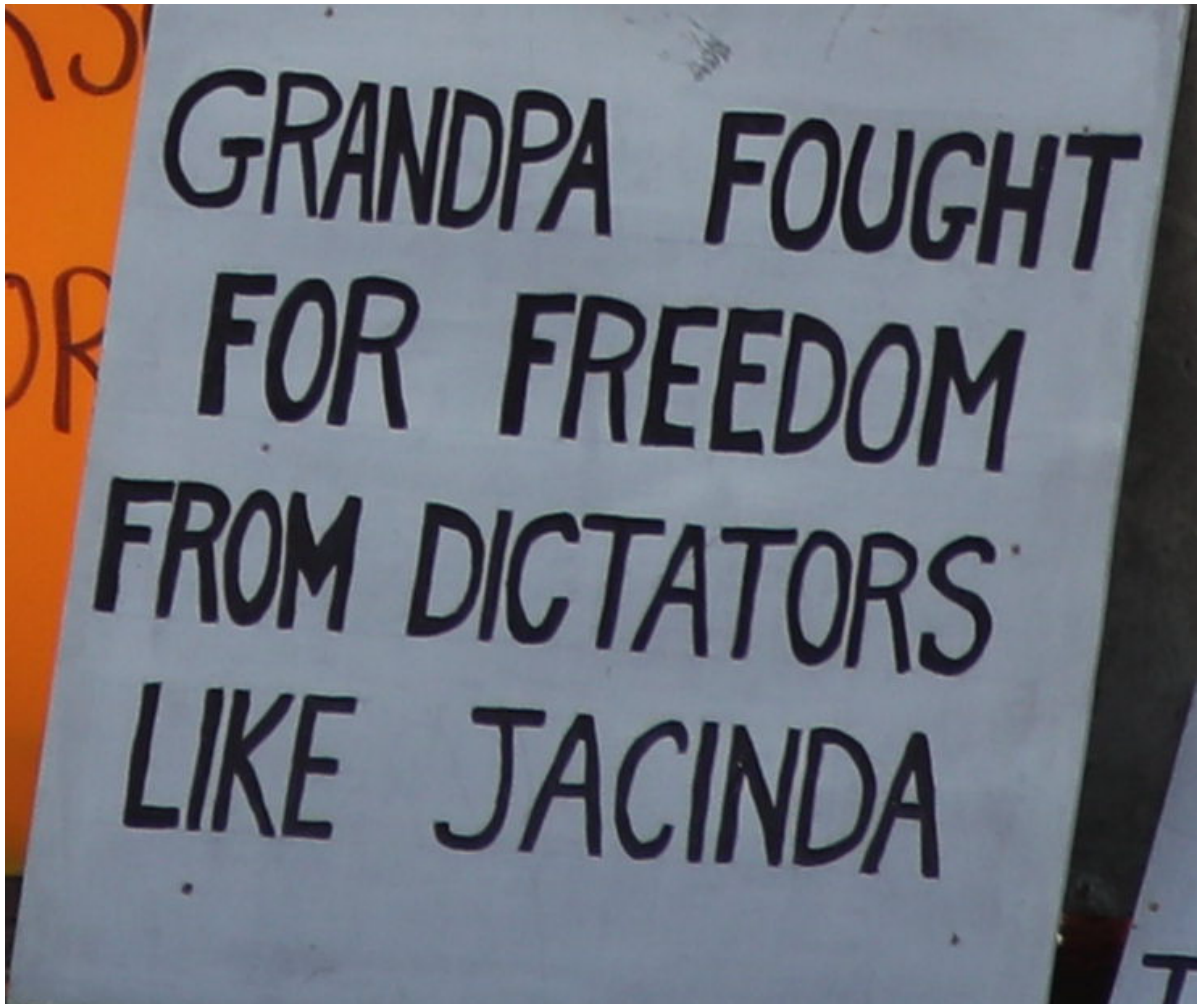


Figure 111

WE THE PEOPLE DO NOT! CONSENT



Figure 112

THIS IS OUR HOUR THIS IS OUR GALLIPOLI DIG IN NEW ZEALAND



Figure 113

She forced you too, so please stand with us not against us



Figure 114

"Anyone who is not vaccinated right now will not be able to enjoy the freedoms of other New Zealanders" - COMRADE ARDERN, FRI 22 OCT, 2021. DON'T COMPLY



Figure 115

For Sale One Prime Minister of N.Z - Has Some delusions, and - Narcistic Qualities. Unsure - of addiction or Gender - or Covid Vaxine status. - As is where is. \$800.00 - Will Swap for Life size Blowup Doll.

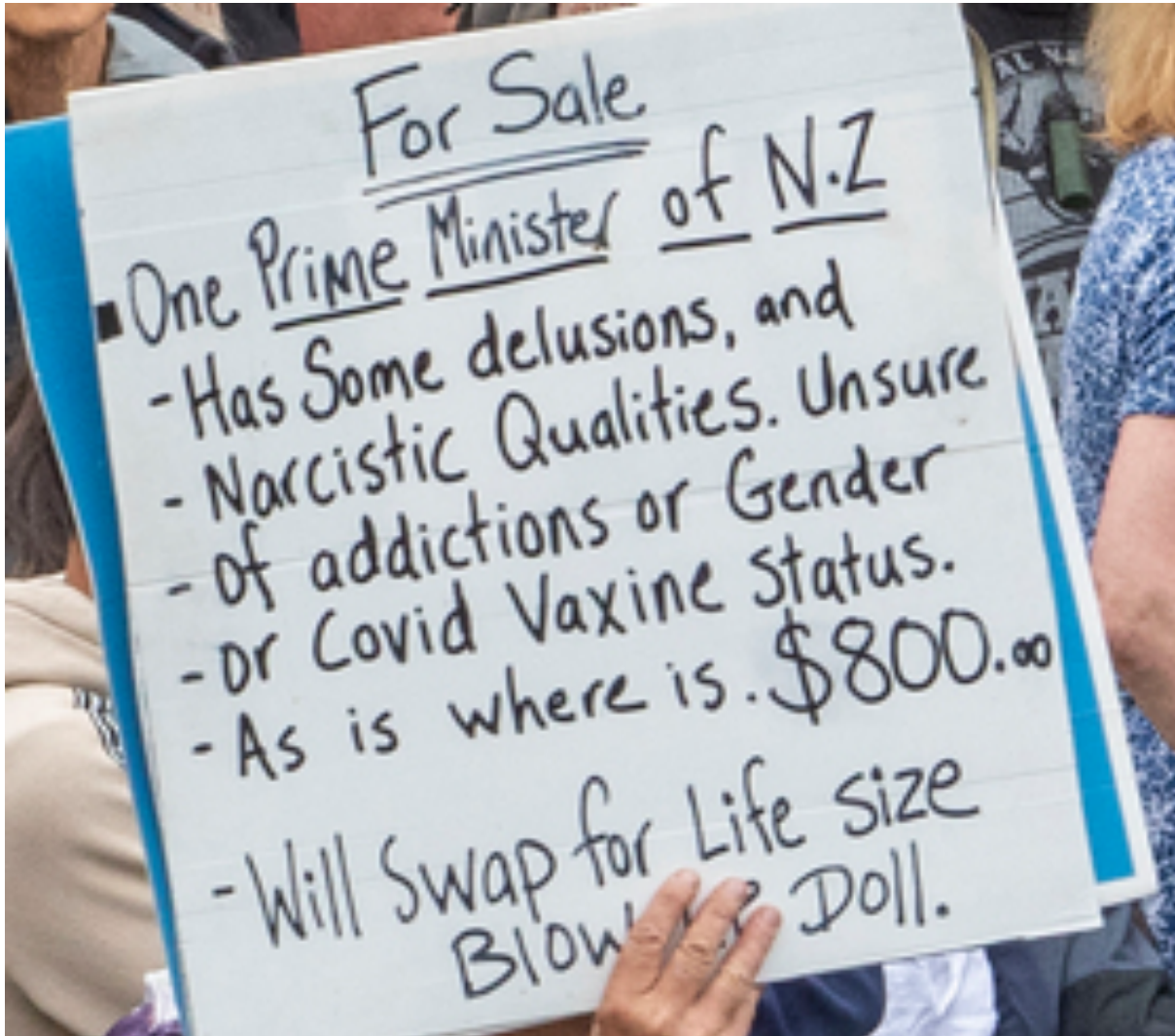


Figure 116

JUCINDA YOU'RE FIRED!



Figure 117

GOVERNMENT ARE THE VIRUS



Figure 118

GeT A Real JOB Bitch FUCK Jacinda!"



Figure 119

Jacinda you're a pussy Get out Here & own your Shit



Figure 120

Everything HITLER did was LEGAL



Figure 121

NUREMBERG ARDERN. HIPKINS. BLOOMFIELD. TRIALS

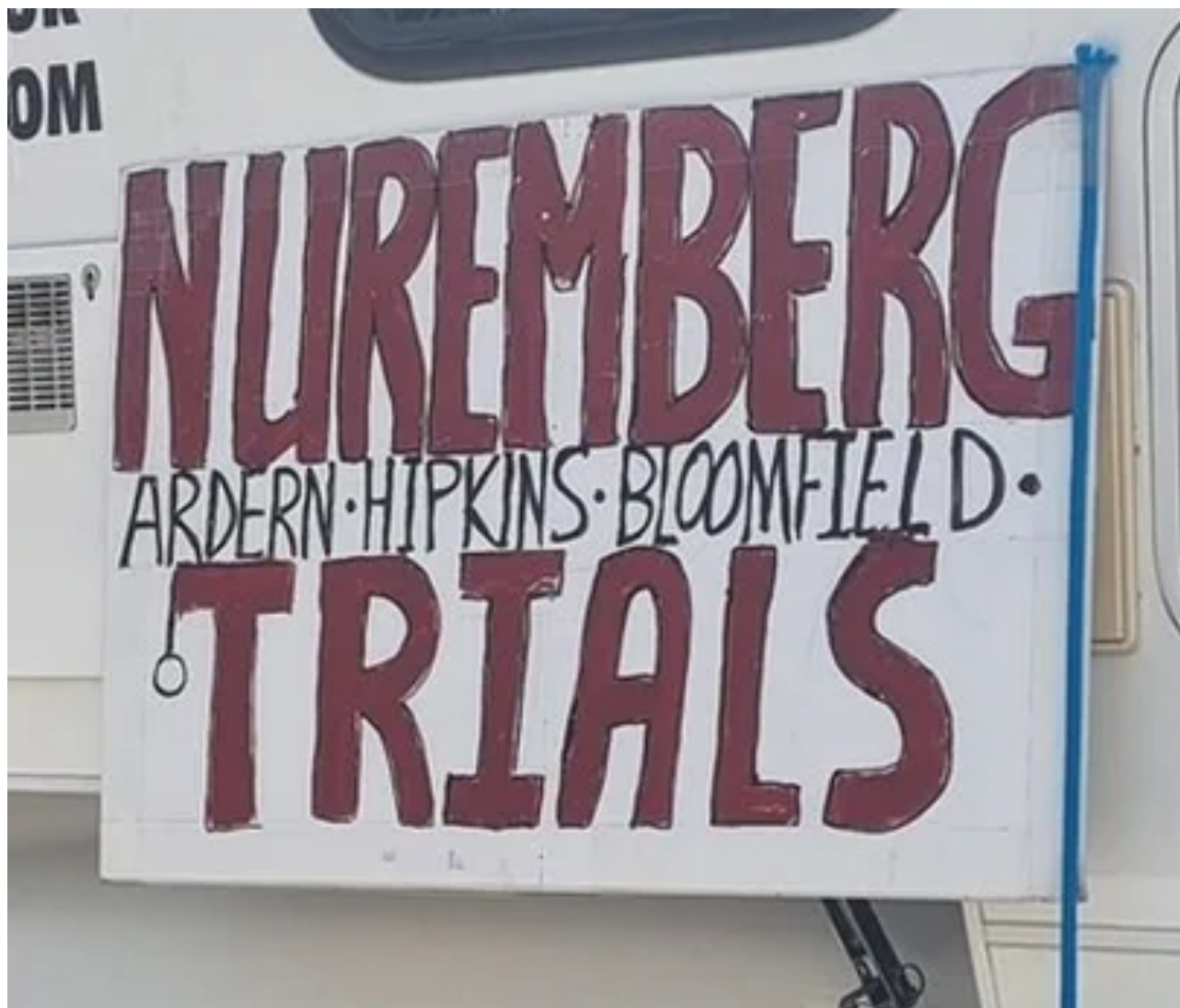


Figure 122

ILLUMINATI Hive of Power Black Rock & Vanguard Control World Corporations NOW Control Most World Countries Five Eyes Nations All Controlled, Plus NZ Politicians All Puppets & 'MSM' All Captured. Judiciary Chamber of Commerce (UN) All captured. Trade Unions - All Captured, Elite Maori, All Captured. HALT & STOP the 'Loveless - Soulless - Godless' NEW WORLD ORDER



Figure 123

To the people feeling inconvenienced by the REVOLUTION my family can't visit or attend libraries, theatres, cafes, birthing suites, funerals, museums, doc huts, pools, resthomes...



Figure 124

May we think of freedom not as the right to do as we please but the opportunity to do what is RIGHT ♥



Figure 125

INVESTIGATE EVIDENCE OF VAX CONTAMINATION



Figure 126

The Vaccine KILLED My Sister 3 Blood Clots In Her Lungs & 1 In Her Aorta



Figure 127

BREAKING NEWS! BREATHING FRESH AIR IS NOT GOING TO KILL YOU (BUT THE EXPERIMENTAL VACCINE MIGHT)

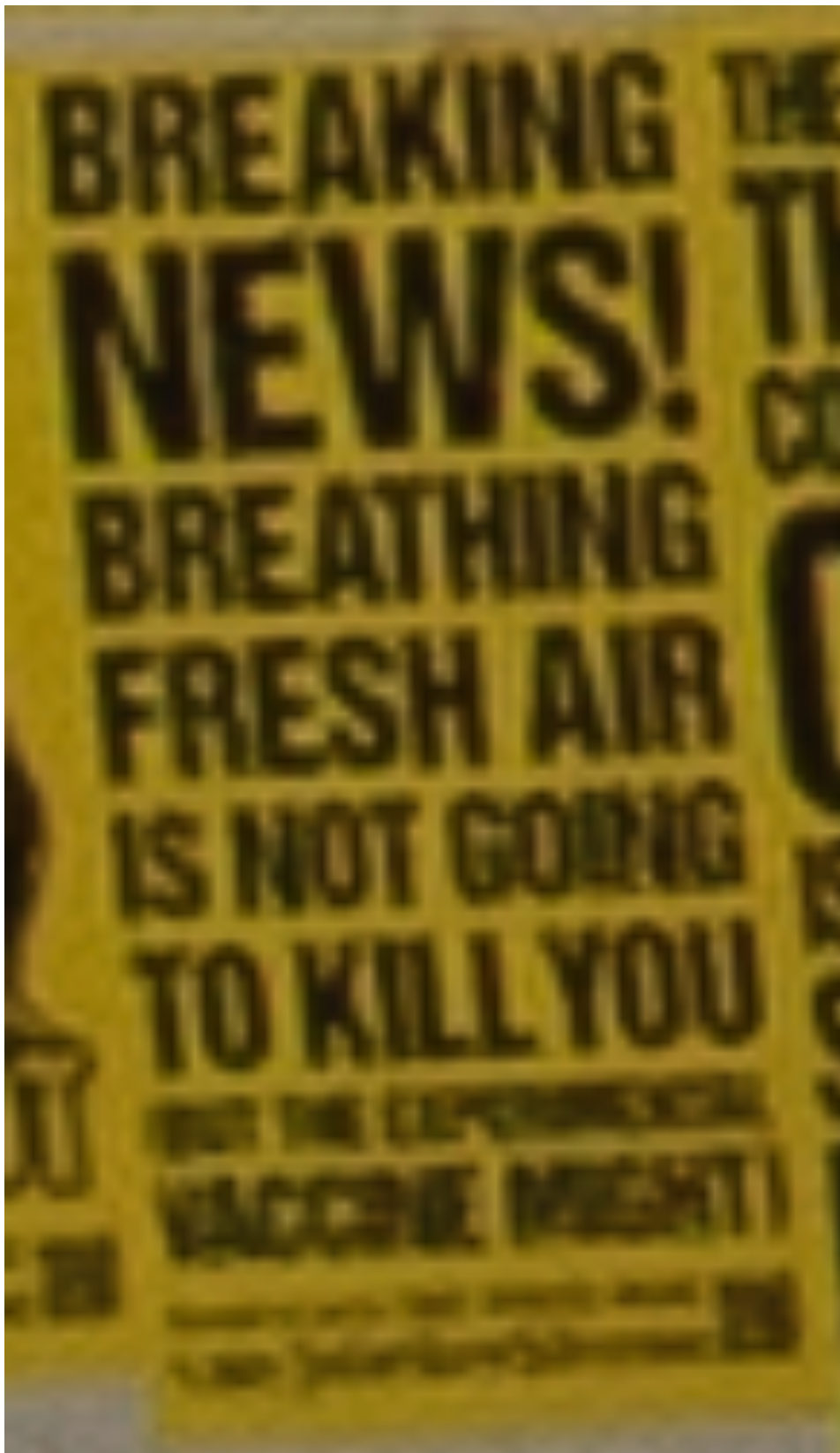


Figure 128

NATURAL IMMUNITY 99.6% EFFECTIVE!!



Figure 129

KEEP HUGGING IT'S HEALTHY



Figure 130

RADIATION TOWERS Stop the unlawful roll-out Stop frying our children to death



Figure 131

TRYING TO FOLLOW THE SCIENCE... BUT IT KEEPS LEADING ME BACK TO THE MONEY!

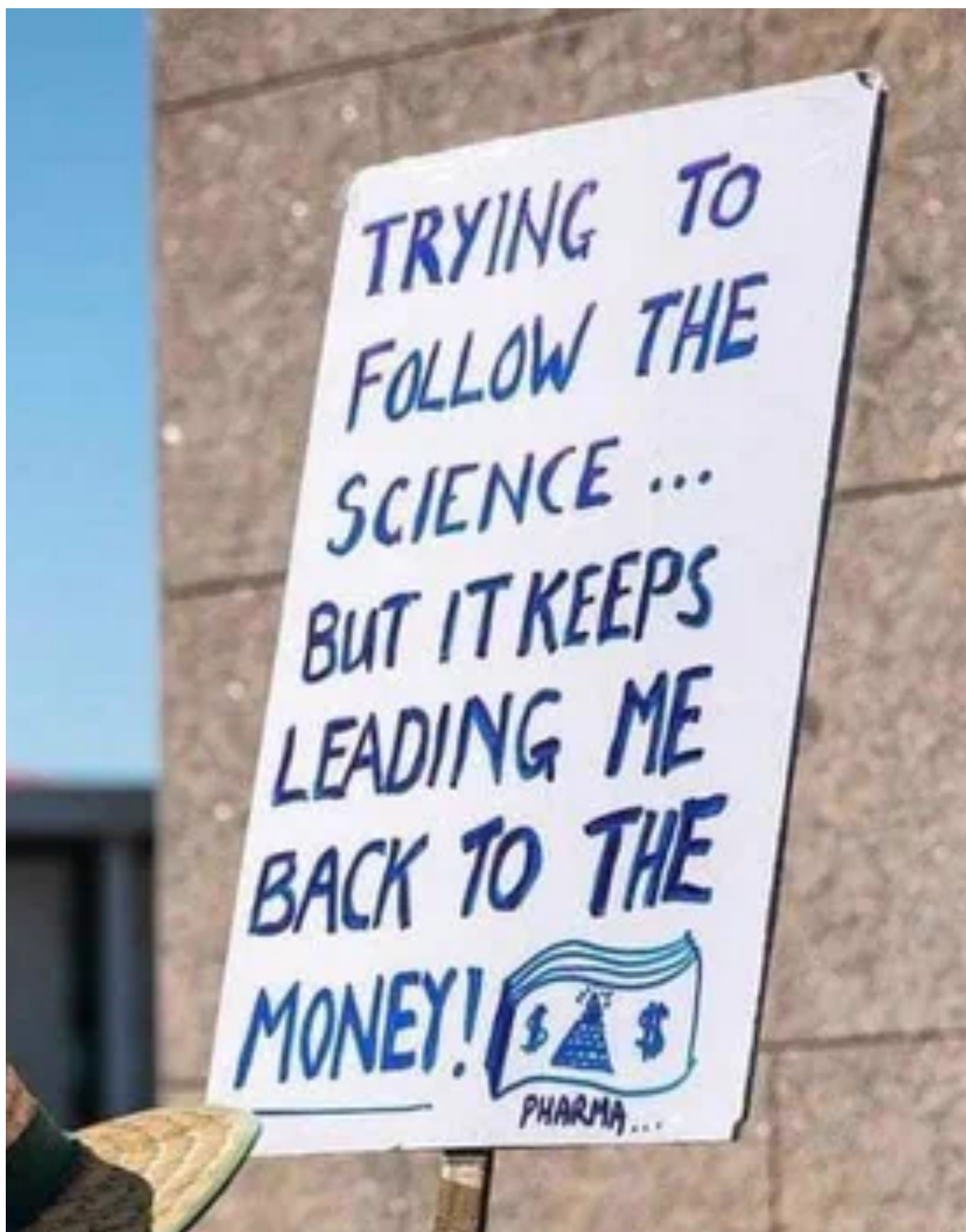


Figure 132

*TRUTH FREEDOM THE GLOBAL PHARMACEUTICAL DECEPTION OF REV.18:23 IS
HERE*



Figure 133

LET'S GO BRANDON



Figure 134

THANK YOU! KEEP FIGHTING FOR OUR FREEDOM!



Figure 135

If I wanted a MANDATE I'd be on Grindr



Figure 136*AROHA*

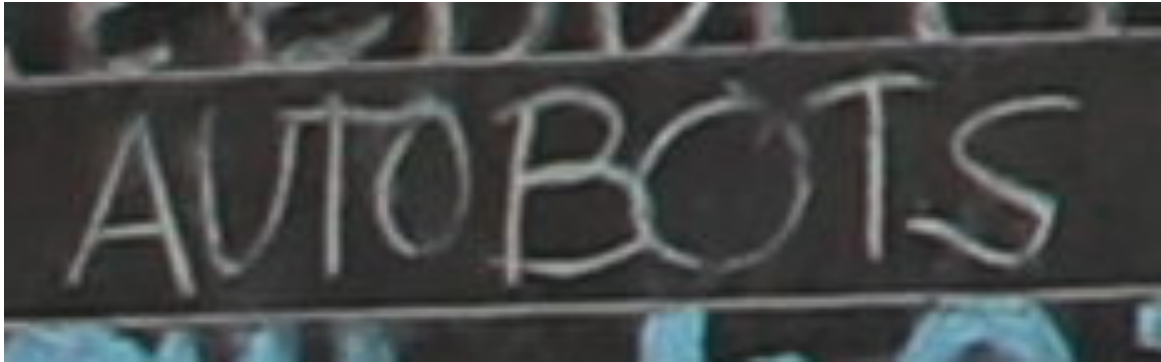
Figure 137*AUTOBOTS*

Figure 138

HONK HONK who's there? The Fringe Minority, BITCH

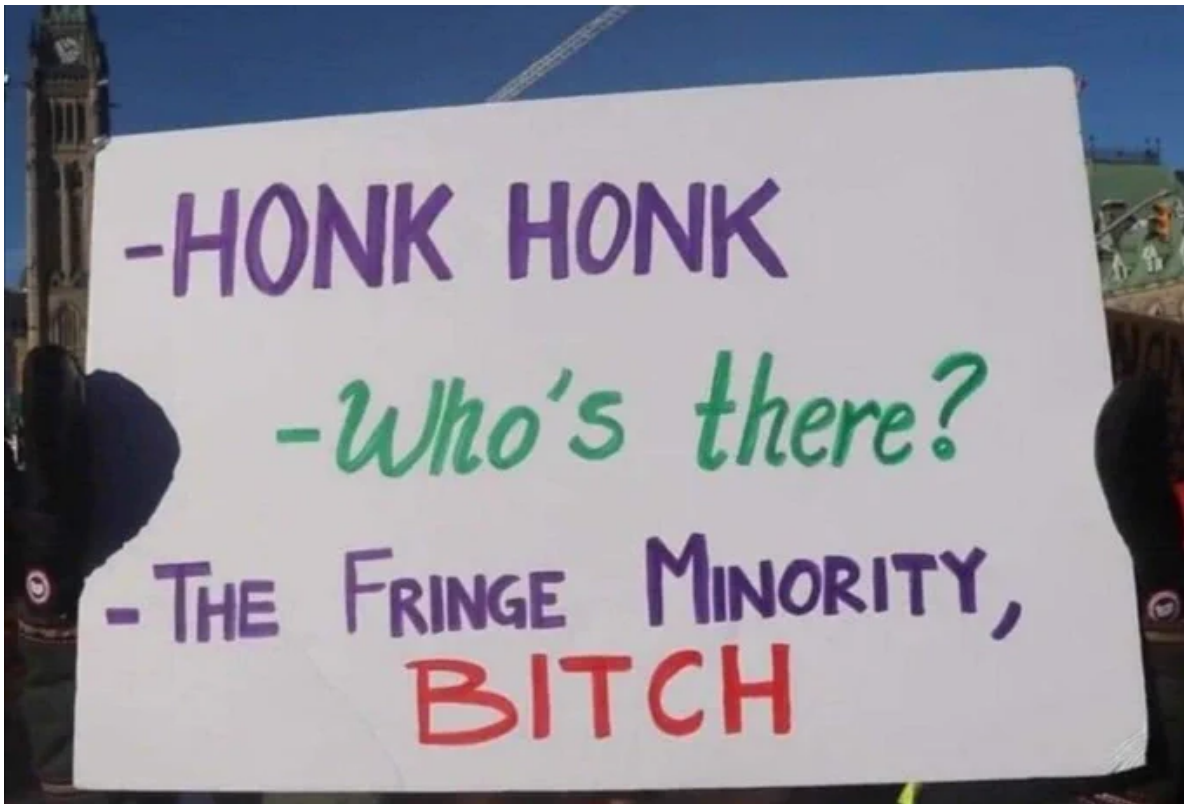


Figure 139

STOP THE MANDATE #FREEDOM



Figure 140

Police Restore your mana - Say Sorry For the Violence You Brought to this peaceful occupation



Figure 141

NZ Police I showed up because of you.



Figure 142

NZ POLICE, We are doing this for you too.



Figure 143

JACINDA IS DESTROYING OUR LIVELIHOODS



Figure 144

Q..... ARE WE CLAPPING OR SACKING OUR HEROES THIS WEEK?

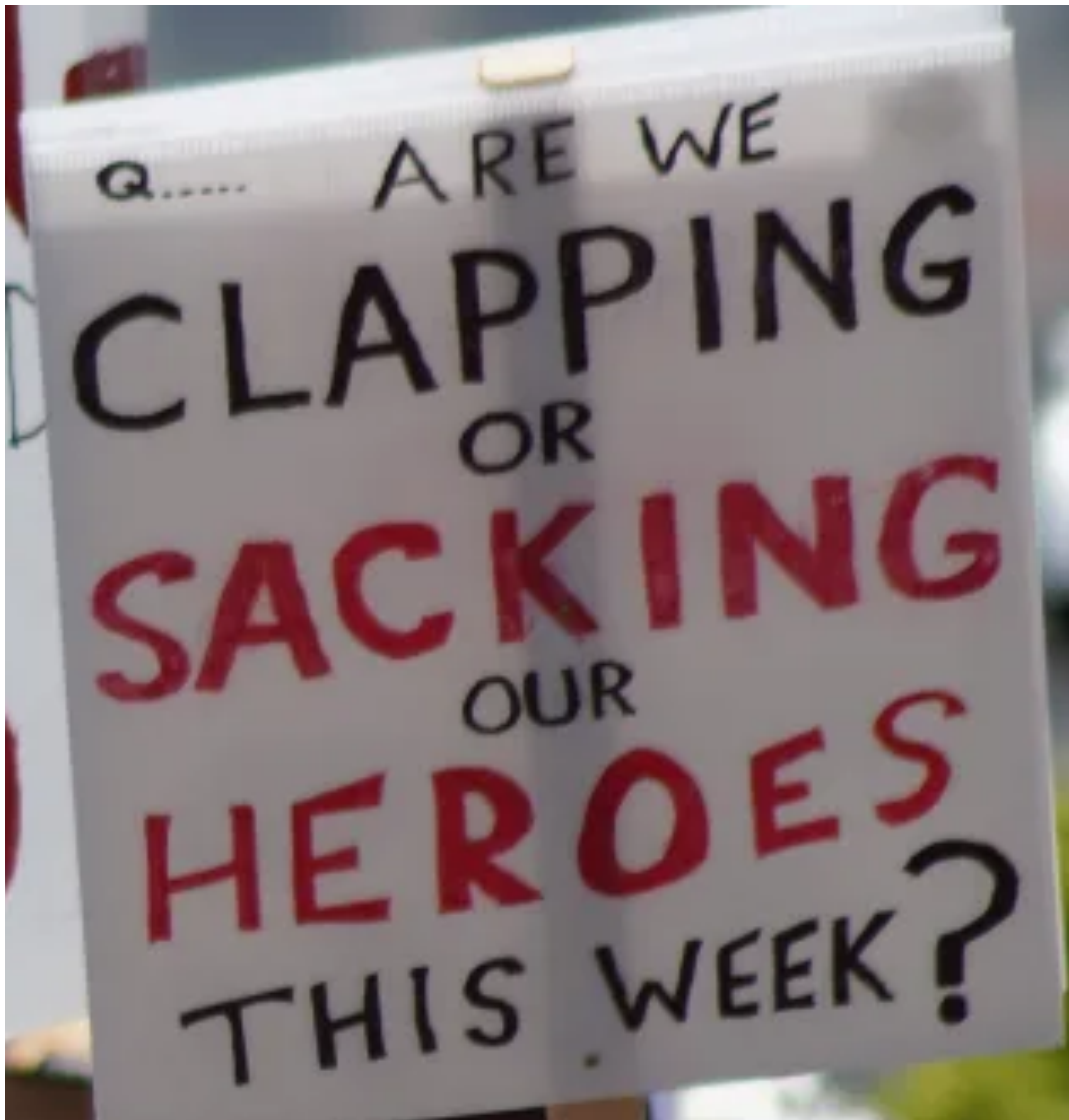


Figure 145

NO LABOUR NO PROBLEM

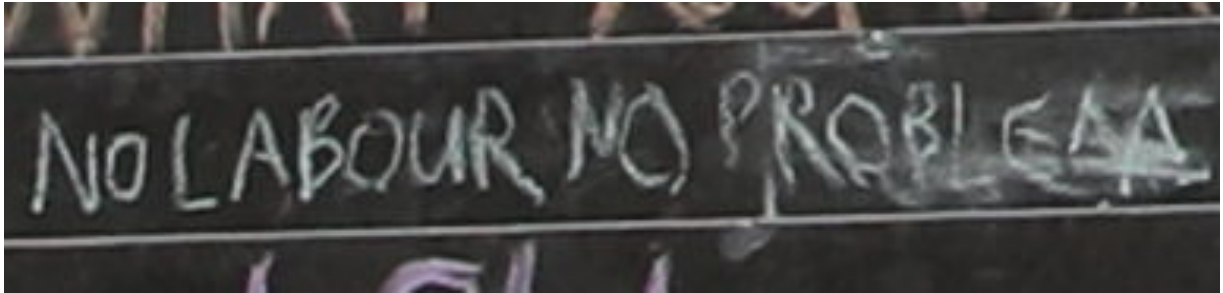


Figure 146

MAKE INFLUENZA GREAT AGAIN



Figure 147

UNMASKED UNVAXXED UNAFRAID

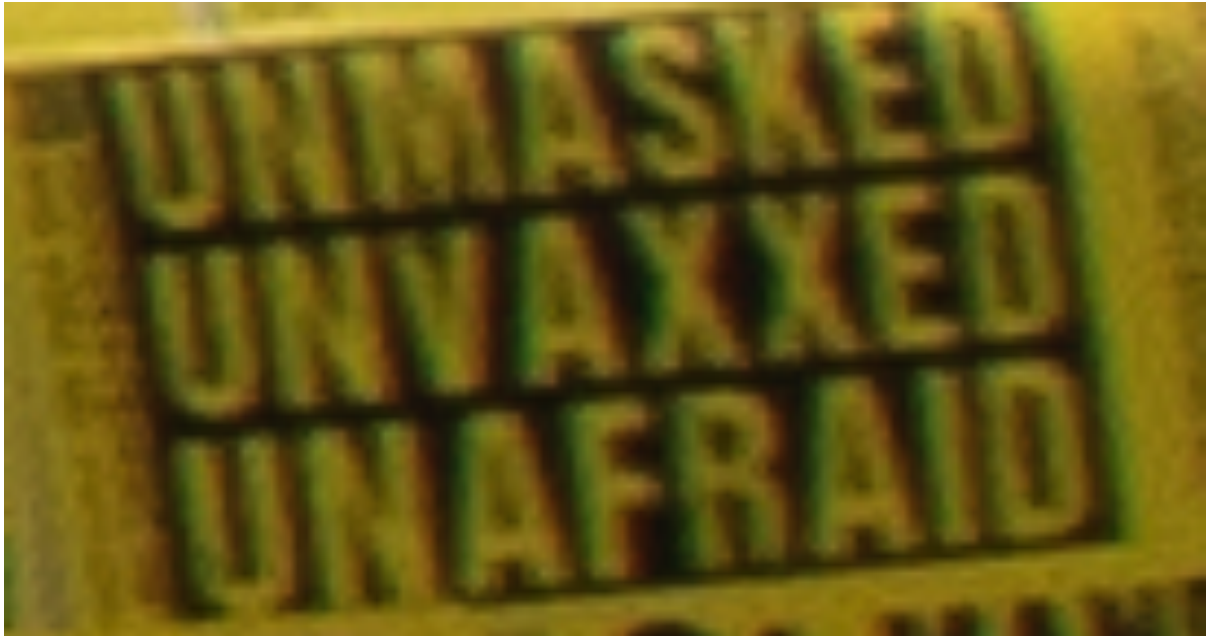


Figure 148

IT'S NOT ABOUT HEALTH IT'S ABOUT CONTROL



Figure 149

JABCINDA WE KNOW!! YOU SOLD YOUR SOUL TO THE DEVIL



Figure 150

N.Z. SAYS "NO" TO THE N.W.O. JABSINDA MUST GO!

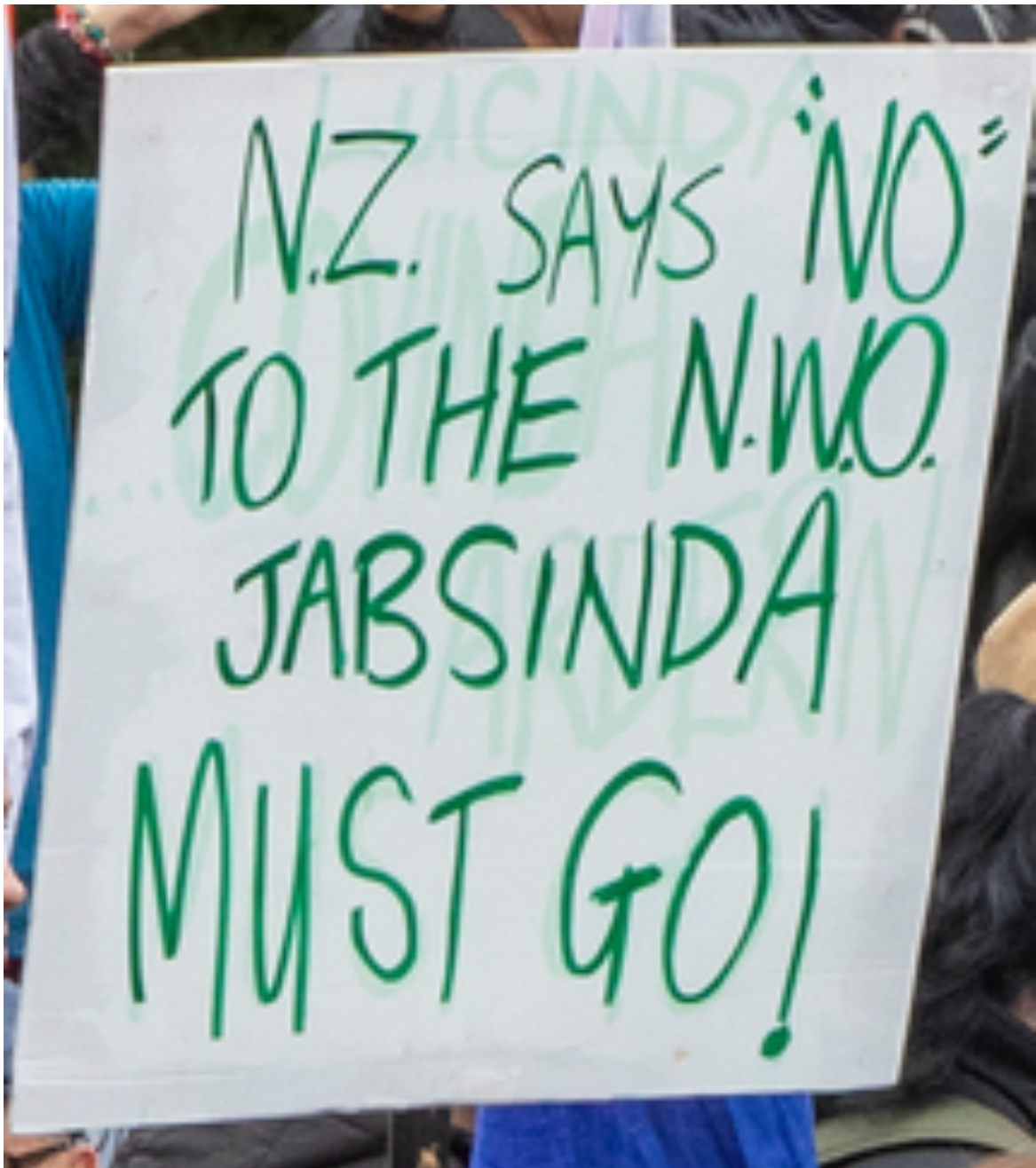


Figure 151

Labour is Red, National is Blue Come out and see us, we might VOTE for you.

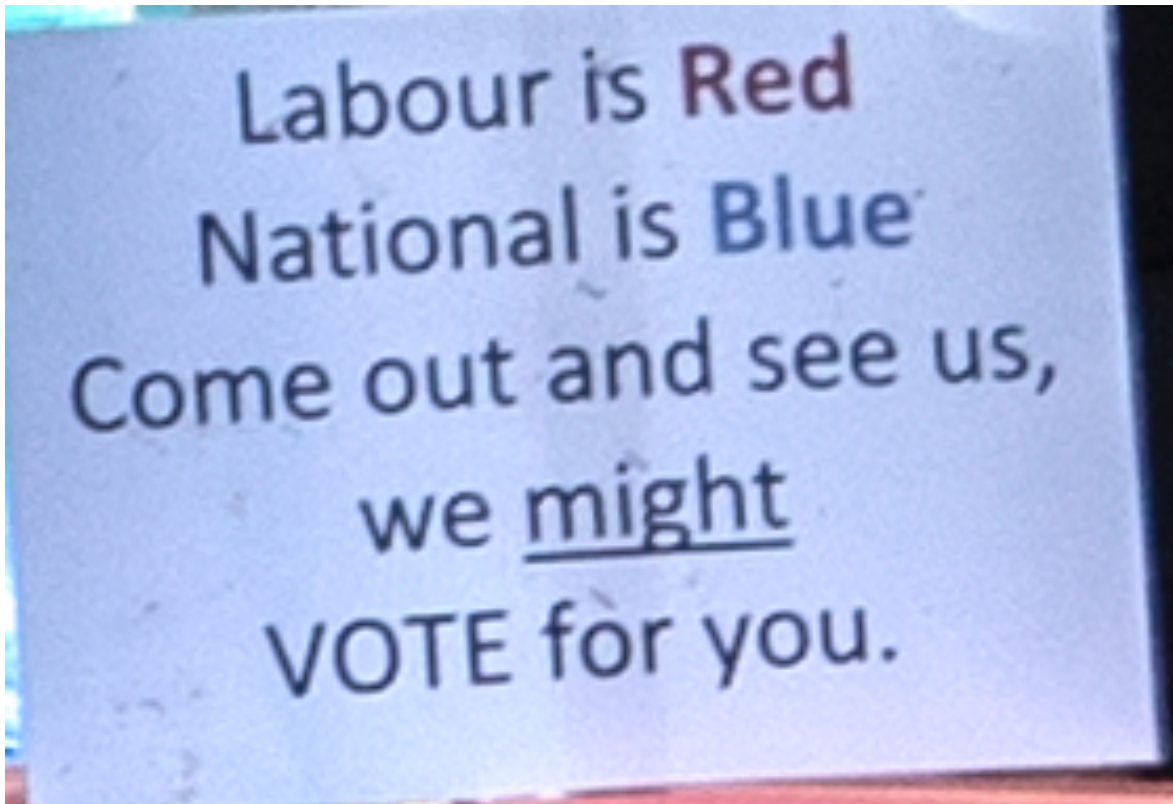


Figure 152

ONLY WAY MALLARD GETS A GIRL WET



Figure 153

SEND MALLARD QUACKING

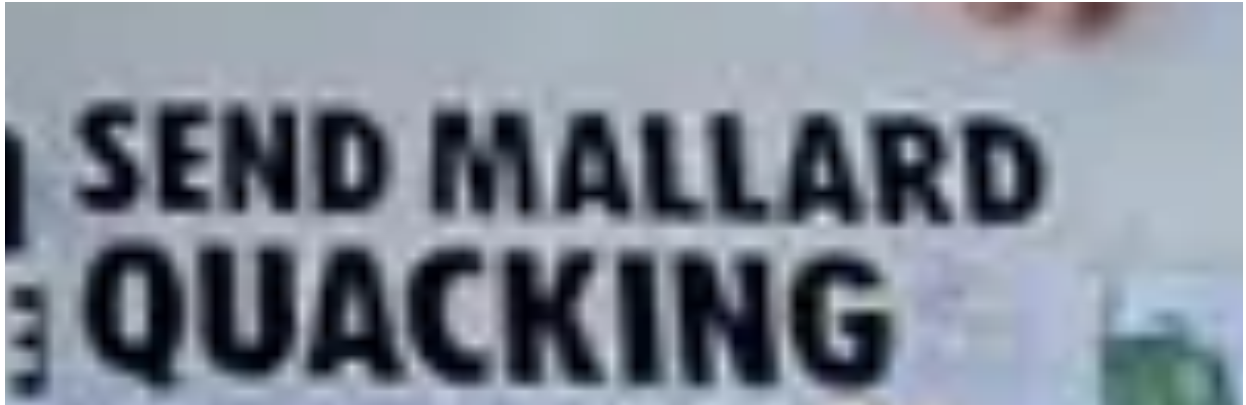


Figure 154

NEWS IS CORRUPT!! BULLSHIT!!

