

Violent messages among misinformation at Parliament protest

[Kristin Hall, 1News Reporter](#) Wed, Feb 16

Nicky Giddens arrived at Molesworth Street just outside Parliament last Tuesday with a black horse float in tow. The float features an image of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern behind bars, a QAnon sign, and a bold banner that reads 'JABCINDA YOUR TAXI IS HERE'.



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protest

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A disinformation researcher says it's hard to communicate just how obscene some of the messages are. (Source: 1News)

Over the past 10 days, protesters have added their own additions, including messages of support, phone numbers, and an image of a syringe going through the prime minister's head.

Giddens says the sign isn't to be taken seriously.

"That's not threatening, that's a joke, come on... we've got better jokes to come and you're gonna see them all very soon," she said.

She agrees that some elements of the protest have gone too far.

"Individuals are speaking their mind because they're angry. The rest of us are all here for peace, love and unity."

But Giddens has bought into the idea that there will be serious consequences for those involved in the vaccine rollout in New Zealand and overseas.

"Gosh the Nuremburg 2.0 trials have started, why is no one reporting on that? You know, that's the crimes against humanity and treason."

Giddens is not alone in believing the Covid-19 vaccine breaks the Nuremberg code. It's an idea that can be spotted on signage around Parliament and is rife in online chats about the protest on Telegram, Facebook, Twitter and Zello.

The Nuremberg code was a response to medical experimentation Nazi doctors performed in concentration camps during WWII, without consent. The trials for the doctors involved concluded more than 70 years ago.

Disinformation researcher at Te Pūnaha Matatini Sanjana Hattotuwa says the idea Nuremberg trials are currently happening or will happen are a carefully constructed conspiracy.

"There is no evidence these trials are taking place in any manner, shape or form anywhere in the country or anywhere in the world.

"Conspiratorialists are conducting their own trials and mock trials and putting it up on social media to promote and project a frame that these things are taking place, none of which is under any kind of jurisprudence or legal framework that is accepted."

On Monday, crowds gathered on Parliament lawns as a list of names of academic and politicians and were called out in a mock trial.

"Innocent or guilty?" a man with the microphone asked after he read out the name of a prominent academic.

"Guilty!" the crowd responded.

Hattotuwa says as chilling as this behaviour is, online discourse about the protest is significantly worse, and is growing in popularity.

"The recent data coming out of the protest, particularly after February 6th, is disturbing on a number of fronts. There is greater volume in terms of the tenor, tone and thrust of mis and disinformation, it's getting extremely violent, vulgar, abusive, vicious and venomous but it's also being produced at a greater pace."

He says it's hard to communicate just how obscene some of the messages are.

"Part of the challenge in this current environment in Aotearoa New Zealand is, if we were to be honest, it would generate BSA complaints in the hundreds if we were to articulate what these frames of discussion are. They are that bad."

Counterspin media director, far-right extremist and protest attendee Kelvyn Alp has repeatedly called for violence online and on the ground at Parliament.

When Act leader David Seymour met with protesters on Wednesday, Alps' response, broadcast on Counterspin, was that Seymour was lucky not to be hanged.

"You're lucky they haven't strung you up from the nearest

bloody lamppost, you clown," Alps said.

"Everyone knows Seymour's just a gimp. All he's done is he's read the room, realised s*** these people are serious, there's a lot more of them throughout New Zealand," Alp said.

Hattotuwa says there is a risk someone may act on what is being threatened.

"When there is violent discourse... it gives a culture of permissiveness to those who might feel compelled to do something offline that they have been convinced online is necessary, urgent and justified. That is the danger and we have never seen this kind of context, this kind of temperature before."

Hattotuwa says misinformation has "instrumentalised" natural feelings of anger and anxiety around Covid-19.

One woman, who didn't want to share her name, tearfully told 1News she was at the protest because of her experience of Covid-19 restrictions when her father died last August.

"My dad was really ill... he passed away and that was it. It was me and my mum, we didn't get a funeral, we didn't get family together...they came and took his body in PPE gear. They couldn't hug us, I couldn't even go to his cremation. Do you know how horrific that is?"

As she filmed on her phone she urged media to "tell the truth".

"Jacinda says she has the vax, I bet that wasn't the vax in there. You can't tell me she's vaxxed," she said.

"You tell me where the pandemic is, please tell me where the pandemic is."