

Radical protesters to return to Wellington

[Australian Associated Press](#) 22 August 2022



Wellington is gearing up for its first significant protest since a three-week occupation earlier this year which ended in fires burning on the lawns of parliament and vicious attacks on police.

Authorities vow there will be no repeat of the extraordinary scenes from February, when anti-vaccine and anti-COVID mandate protesters travelled in convoy to the New Zealand capital and refused to leave. Their stay culminated in a brutal showdown.

Tuesday's protest is likely to be dwarfed in size by the summer protest, and by a counter-demonstration being

organised across the road.

Researchers still warn the protest could attract dangerous individuals - including neo-Nazis - and have a destructive effect.

"I have no doubt that the police and (spy agency) SIS are fully aware and prepped for whatever may transpire but it's hard to determine the nature of what will happen tomorrow," University of Otago's Sanjana Hattotuwa said.

"This is actually unprecedented in this country."

On Monday, the right-wing Freedom and Rights Coalition began a new convoy from the northern and southern tips of the country which will converge in the capital on Tuesday.

After marching through the city, they are promising to hold "The People's Court" on parliament grounds, where speakers will lay out the various "Crimes Against Humanity" by individuals including politicians, academics, public health experts and journalists.

"It's theatre that is based on a violent script," Dr Hattotuwa, research lead for the The Disinformation Project, said.

"But if you study what we study, there is no permutation, variation, interpretation or version of this that is non-violent.

"The whole business of doing this is to hang people who are found guilty."

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who was mercilessly targeted during the occupation, said she wanted the protest to be happen.

"Parliament is a place where we will continue to welcome peaceful and lawful protest. But again, we're really imploring people: peaceful and lawful," she said.

The Freedom and Rights Coalition is led by fundamentalist Christian and right-wing Aucklander Brian Tamaki, who rallied opposition to the government's COVID-19 response and aspires to win seats in parliament.

Mr Tamaki was spotted eating fish and chips in downtown Wellington on Monday afternoon, telling journalists they had no plans for a second occupation.

Dr Hattotuwa said all sorts of people with varied misgivings could piggyback the occasion, including security threats.

"There is very clearly neo-Nazi interest and involvement in the convoy and we expect them to be there in Wellington," he said.

"Tamaki has his own political aspirations ... but he doesn't control the narrative that he is going to unleash tomorrow. And that's really worrying."

Police expect a lawful protest, and parliament's speaker says he will not allow protesters to set up camp again.

February's occupation spiralled out of control when

authorities underestimated the group's determination.

Speaker Trevor Mallard drew scorn for his decision to play annoying songs, including Baby Shark and the Macarena, over loudspeakers to get protesters to leave.

Instead, they were emboldened.

Things came to a head on March 2 when police were attacked as they cleared the grounds, finding themselves showered with bricks and human excrement.

Hundreds of charges have since been laid against protesters.

In preparation for this week, road blocks have been put in place around parliament to prevent cars from blocking streets, as they did in February, with additional fencing and security ordered for Parliament House.

Right-wing blogger Avi Yemeni also claims to have been denied entry to New Zealand to attend the protests.