

Timothy Musson

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March 25th, 2021

Dear Minister,

Kia ora! Ko Tim Musson tōku ingoa. Kei te noho au ki Ōtautahi.

Thank you for your mahi; I'd rather not be bothering you!

I'm writing to request an explanation for your support for Alexei Navalny.

As a former student of Russian at the University of Canterbury, I can see for myself what Navalny has written and said in his prolific blog and video posts. He is most definitely *not* the person western governments, including ours, make him out to be.

You imply that Aotearoa supports Navalny, omitting details that would horrify New Zealanders. Our government has the resources to know the things I'm about to point out, so Labour's lack of context when speaking about Navalny is deeply concerning.

Navalny is an unashamed white supremacist. In a disturbing video[1] on his personal YouTube channel, he advocates for the legalization of hand guns — suggesting their use against migrant “flies” and “cockroaches”. He demonstrates the use of a pistol against an attacking “Homo sapiens borderless”: an actor dressed as a Muslim.

In 2007, Navalny was arrested for shooting a Central Asian man four times in the chest with rubber bullets. He allegedly provoked the man with a racial slur after the man gave a rose to a Russian woman at a bar. The man was shot as he stepped toward Navalny, without having laid a finger on anyone. In a blog post[2], Navalny brags about getting his gun back from the police. Here are a couple of excerpts, explaining why he carries a gun and not a knife:

“I must admit, the sight of a knife often makes the right impression on an unfriendly conversation partner — but, on the whole, it seems to me that there are more minuses than pluses.”

[...]

“There are of course more exotic options. One of my friends carries a metal shoe-horn in his bag. It has a long handle and weighs about 400 grams. The edges are quite sharp, the skull is easy to split, and nobody can prove that its use as a weapon was premeditated :)”

In the comment section of the same blog post, someone asks if Russians are forbidden from carrying firearms. Navalny gives an anti-Semitic reply:


“Everyone else [i.e. everyone besides ethnic Russians] is protected by the Holocaust Foundation — that's more powerful than any hand-gun.”

Navalny has a history of participation and speaking at the “Russian March”, an annual rally attended by far-right nationalist and neo-Nazi groups. He has continued to encourage attendance at these openly anti-Semitic, homophobic, and anti-migrant events, putting his own absence in recent years down to “diplomacy”, not personal change.

He suggests that citizens who are not of the Russian ethnicity ought to be forcibly deported. In a video[3] entitled “Become a Nationalist!”, Navalny shows Central Asian people being herded out of apartments, hands in the air, and boarding planes out of Russia. He compares them to rotten teeth, and says *“Everything that bothers us ought to be neatly, thoroughly, and firmly removed”*. But he cautions against displays of neo-Nazi fanaticism, showing photos of Nazi leaders executed at Nuremburg.

When asked why he hasn't deleted these videos, he says he has nothing to regret[4].



Навальный ( [navalny](#)) wrote,
2008-06-09 11:10:00

Blogging about a conference he attended in 2008, Navalny begins with a happy face captioned “Imagine no liberals”[5]. He expresses satisfaction with the speakers and their strategy for strengthening the far-right nationalist movement within Russia:

“The primary goal is to get rid of discrediting elements: Hitlerists, hooligans, and pseudo-patriots; to get out of the marginal ghetto of small parties, and find support in the educated class. [...] There's no sense bringing in the skinhead movement. We need lawyers, economists, and journalists.”

In 2010, Navalny went to the US on a scholarship to the “Yale World Fellows” program for rising global leaders, before running for Mayor of Moscow in 2013 on an anti-migrant platform. To attract younger voters and to “find support in the educated class” in the run up to that election, his speech became more diplomatic. He’s gained support amongst Putin critics by highlighting government corruption.

One of our own government’s complaints about Putin is the violent forced return of Crimea to Russia. (Crimea, historically Russian, was transferred to Ukraine in 1954 — not by the people of Russia *per se*, but by the leaders of “our enemy” the USSR.) Western governments condemned Putin for it, and imposed sanctions. Navalny has repeatedly stated that Crimea is part of Russia — as one would expect of a Russian nationalist, considering Crimea’s history, majority Russian demographics, and NATO encroachment. The situation is more complicated than western politicians tell us.

In 2017 Navalny ruled out returning Crimea to Ukraine without a referendum, if he were President. He pointed out that a referendum would naturally favour Russia[6]. Crimea’s ethnic Ukrainian demographic is currently around 15%, and its peak has never exceeded around 26%. Navalny’s referendum would indeed leave Crimea with Russia, regardless of outside opinion.

Considering what happened here in Ōtautahi on March 15th, 2019, and with the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service saying there's no doubt white supremacist extremism is on the rise, how is it acceptable for our government — and for you as Minister of Foreign Affairs — to not mention Alexei Navalny's background when implying that Aotearoa supports him?

Suppose you reply that “we” don't support Navalny's views, only his freedom.

In that case, your demand for Navalny's immediate release makes Labour's lack of concern for Julian Assange and his illegal detention and psychological torture by our own “allies” even more inexcusable. To demand freedom for Navalny but not Assange suggests that human rights are *not* the driving issue here.

According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, *“[the Assange] case has never been about Mr. Assange's guilt or innocence, but about making him pay the price for exposing serious governmental misconduct, including alleged war crimes and corruption. Unless the UK urgently changes course and alleviates his inhumane situation, Mr. Assange's continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life.”* [7]

Apparently, Aotearoa's Labour Party would sooner mislead us into assuming Alexei Navalny is some kind of heroic Putin alternative, than stand up for Julian Assange.

Navalny represents far-right nationalist xenophobia, much more so than Putin. He does not represent the positive, democratic change we in the west are being led, by lies of omission, to expect. Many Russian citizens, especially those who aren't ethnically Russian, are absolutely terrified of Navalny.

How should our Muslim, Asian, and other brothers and sisters feel about Labour's concern for a calculating, xenophobic, fascist-dictator-in-waiting? Why is the supposedly left-leaning Labour Party cooperating with the US to build Navalny up as a heroic figure? Considering Labour's silence about the illegal detention and psychological torture of our own neighbour Julian Assange, it's clear that human rights are *not* behind your support for Alexei Navalny. So what is? Please explain.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Musson

[1] <https://youtu.be/oVNJiO1oSWw>

[2] <https://navalny.livejournal.com/242897.html>

[3] <https://youtu.be/ICoc2VmGdfw>

[4] <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2021/03/02/nava-j01.html>

[5] <https://navalny.livejournal.com/248485.html>

[6] <https://uacrisis.org/en/weekly-update-on-ukraine-2-11-17-january>

[7] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25249>

From the two Navalny videos described in this letter:



This is what “Russian March” rallies look like. Navalny himself is in the top two photos:

