

US media glorifies small protests by right-wing Putin opponent Alexei Navalny

By Clara Weiss
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The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* have provided ample coverage of the “voters’ strike” on January 28 in which they continue to glorify and cover up for the right-wing program of Alexei Navalny.

Navalny had announced the “voters’ strike” in response to his being barred from participating in the March presidential elections. For weeks, his campaign team has mobilized online and on the ground, even as several of his supporters and campaign team members were arrested. All of this was continuously covered and commented upon by the US media.

If one considers the scale of this campaign, the results were rather pathetic. With a maximum of 3,500 protesters in Moscow and about 2,000 in St. Petersburg—the cities have a combined population of over 15 million people—the protests counted among the smallest organized by the “liberal” opposition in years. A few hundred people protested in other cities and towns across the country.

Navalny and some 256 other protesters were detained by the police and released later in the evening.

In their articles, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are trying to make their readers believe that the low turnout reflects general political apathy, if not support for Putin. This is not true. Last year, tens of thousands of people protested against social inequality and corruption, and anyone who follows commentaries to online articles and on social media knows that there is widespread social and political anger. The fact that Navalny has been unable to tap into this massive social and political discontent is largely a result of his right-wing program, which the US media has been careful to bury.

Based on their coverage of these protests and the anti-Putin opposition in general, readers of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* or NPR would be at a

loss to make any statement about Navalny’s politics or the outlook of his supporters. In descriptions that, in political terms, can mean everything and nothing, their readers are told that Navalny is “the charismatic, anticorruption opposition leader” (*New York Times*) and a “prominent Putin critic and anti-corruption campaigner” (NPR).

Who would guess, judging by such descriptions, that Navalny has participated in fascist demonstrations, called for mass deportations of immigrants, and is notorious for racist remarks about people from the Caucasus? Or that he continues to advertise his ties to leaders of the Russian fascist scene on his Russian-language blog?

Who would fathom that Navalny has expressed social-Darwinist hatred of poor people in an interview with the right-wing National Bolshevik Zakhar Prilepin? And he maintains close ties to sections of the Russian oligarchy and was trained in Yale’s “World Fellowship” program, which also trained several leading figures from the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution” of 2004 and the Maidan of 2013/2014.

Judging by the limited interviews with protesters available in the press, while Navalny was able to capitalize to some extent on widespread social discontent last year, now it is the most right-wing and disoriented elements that continue to support him.

According to *meduza*, an outlet which is close to the “liberal” opposition, one of the protesters in Moscow denounced the police arresting Navalny from a racist standpoint: “And what if some Caucasians showed up, huh? Would you arrest them too, or would you just stand there?”

Another young protester reportedly told his friends: “The opposition doesn’t have a leader other than Navalny who could unite the right and the left.” This is

a reference to Navalny's program of uniting the far-right with the liberals and the pseudo-left. Unsurprisingly, many of the protesters carried Russian flags.

In Yekaterinburg, the protests were supported and addressed by the city's mayor, Yevgeny Roizman, whom the *Washington Post* quoted without providing any information to its readers about his politics ("What we are being offered right now are not elections, and we must not participate in them.")

Much like Navalny, Roizman is a fascistic figure, who has been called a liberal for the sole reason that he is somewhat opposed to Putin. In reality, Roizman is notorious for a violent campaign against drugs and a drug rehabilitation center which saw multiple kidnappings, and multiple cases of violence against patients. Like Navalny, Roizman doesn't shy from expressing his racist views, most notably against Sinti and Roma and people from Tajikistan.

Of course, the *New York Times*, NPR, and the *Washington Post* know full well what figures they are dealing with in Navalny and Roizman. But even a bit of honesty about their politics would show both the campaign against Trump's "collusion" with Russia and the anti-Putin campaign for what they are: right-wing political operations fostering the aims of sections of the US imperialist elite who view Russia as the main obstacle to America's geopolitical interests.

The hypocrisy revealed in the support of the so-called liberal media for Navalny is stunning: the same newspapers that commented with plenty of outrage about Trump's racist rhetoric have absolutely no trouble supporting fascistic and racist tendencies in Russia, under the fraudulent guise of supporting a "liberal" opposition against the authoritarian Putin regime. In reality, the Kremlin under the racist Navalny would, of course, be every bit as authoritarian as it is under Putin.

The writing of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* on Navalny and Russia is not news coverage, but propaganda. They deliberately mislead their readership about the character of the forces that US imperialism has been propping up in Russia. Much as in Ukraine in 2014, US imperialism in Russia is now engaged in a systematic effort to destabilize and topple the Putin regime by relying on nationalist and far-right "Putin critics." The fact that this has proven far more difficult

in Russia than it was in Ukraine has no doubt significantly added to the venom and hysteria with which these outlets pursue their campaign.

The anti-Putin campaign signals a new stage in the right-ward lurch of the Democratic Party and its media allies, and the advanced preparations of the American bourgeoisie for both major imperialist wars abroad and repression at home.

The support of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* for fascistic figures like Navalny should be a stark warning to American workers of what is in store for them if the anti-Putin campaign waged by the Democratic Party and its supporters in the media against Trump is successful. The only progressive way to fight against the danger of war and authoritarianism, which emanates from all sections of the bourgeoisie, is a unified struggle of the international working class against capitalism.

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