

# **“You are not welcome in New Zealand, Mr. Rovics.”**

**Or, the 207<sup>th</sup> reason why to hate all nation states**

David Rovics

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It was mid-August, and after singing at various events, mainly ones commemorating the bombing of Hiroshima, I was supposed to be switching planes, en route from Fukuoka to Christchurch, New Zealand, via Tokyo and Auckland. When I got paged over the intercom to the All Nippon Airways desk I was nervous, but figured it was something about a seat assignment on the flight from Narita to Auckland that I was about to board. When the woman from ANA handed me a cell phone and said that someone from New Zealand Immigration in Auckland wanted to talk to me, I was suddenly feeling fatalistic.

“Mr. Rovics, why are you coming to New Zealand?”

The immigration agent sounded like a miserable person who liked her job way too much. It was obvious why she wanted to know—because she already knew I was coming to play a few small gigs, and it wouldn’t do for me to say I was just going to enjoy the winter weather, though in fact that was one of the main things I was looking forward to.

“I’m playing six small gigs.”

She already knew this, but she wanted to hear it from me. I learned from my problems entering Canada that lying is the thing they dislike the most.

“Will you be paid anything for these engagements?”

“Yes, I hope to make a little money while in New Zealand, though it’s all very marginal,” I replied.

Which sure is the truth. Nobody tours New Zealand to make money, as far as I know. The people there who make the laws issuing work permits seem to know this—a work permit for New Zealand is free. The only charge involved is the permission you need to get from the musician’s union. Which, last time I got one, was also free. They waived it since they heard I was singing at a labor rally in Dunedin.

“Do you have a work permit?”

She obviously also knew the answer to this question—she’s an immigration agent, for Pete’s sake.

“No,” I replied, “I was hoping I could get one when I arrived. I was under the impression it was a formality that could easily be taken care of when I got there.”

Which is true. Although I sure was wishing I had taken care of this formality a long time before. Which is what I had done before my three previous tours of Aotearoa, aka New Zealand. The problem is, unless you live near a city with a New Zealand consulate in it, which I don’t, you have to mail your passport in to their embassy in Washington, DC, and be without a passport for several weeks, which is a logistical challenge for someone who tours as much as me. One I vainly hoped I could avoid, and one I’ve managed to avoid in Australia, where I have successfully gotten work visas after arriving on Australian soil twice before.

“Mr. Rovics, can you tell me what happened to you recently at the airport in Trondheim, Norway?”

I wanted to tell her to get to the point, but I knew that I had to answer all of her questions if I wanted to have any chance of getting in to her lovely, stolen country of rolling hills, sheep, and imprisoned native people.

“I was strip-searched on suspicion of drug smuggling. But I wasn’t smuggling drugs.”

Although most of my blog posts are only read by a few hundred people, some of them are apparently working for the government of New Zealand.

“What happened to you in Canada?”

I told her what she already knew. I was banned from Canada for a year, because I tried to get in as a tourist when really I was planning to do a gig at the Railway Club in Vancouver, for which I hadn't gotten a work permit. I lied to Immigration Canada about it. I knew better than to do that this time, but it didn't help.

Then the shoe finally dropped.

“You can't board that flight tonight, and you can't come to New Zealand until you get a work permit.”

“Can I cancel all my gigs and come in on a tourist visa? If I don't fly to Auckland then I can't fly from there to Perth, or from Brisbane to Hong Kong, etc.”

It was a bit of a cascading, chain reaction clusterfuck sort of situation. Buying a new plane ticket to anywhere I need to go will likely cost thousands of dollars.

“You can't board that flight. You're not welcome in New Zealand.”

“I know it's none of my business,” I said, “but is it normal for immigration agents to read the blogs of people traveling to New Zealand?”

“I've read your blog,” was her answer to that question.

“Did someone tell you about my blog? Is there a reason you read my blog in particular?”

“I've read your blog,” she repeated. “Thank you,” she said, indicating she was done talking to me, and I handed the phone back to the ANA agent.

After the ANA agent got off the phone, she and all the rest of them looked shocked. Nothing like this had ever happened to them.

There was a hotel room available around the corner from the airport. Work visa lined up for Australia, so at least that leg of the tour is happening. (Just did the first of 13 gigs I'm doing throughout Australia.) Next time I'll try to be more cognizant of the fact that the spies are reading my blog, and get a damn work visa.

David Rovics is a singer/songwriter based in Portland, Oregon. He is currently on a tour of 12 countries on four continents. His website is [davidrovics.com](http://davidrovics.com). His recent songs are posted there.

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