

Britain: Media attack on MP George Galloway aimed at smearing antiwar protests

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Britain's right-wing media has launched hysterical denunciations of Scottish Labour MP George Galloway charging him with having money from Saddam Hussein's regime. The thrust of this smear campaign is to indict the entire mass movement against the Iraq war as illegitimate.

The affair bares all the hallmarks of an orchestrated witch-hunt, in which the intelligence services have colluded—either directly or indirectly—with one or more of the most right-wing newspapers in Britain in order to discredit Galloway, who has been a prominent voice in the antiwar movement.

The circumstances in which the documents are said to have been discovered are to say the least extraordinary.

Daily Telegraph reporter David Blair claims to have “stumbled” across several documents indicating that Galloway had received more than £375,000 a year from Iraq's “Oil for Food” programme during his trawl of the ruins of the Iraqi Information Ministry in Baghdad.

According to Blair, he found the files intact as he searched a “heap of grubby box files” on the floor of the bombed-out ministry while looters “scurried through the corridors”.

Whilst “everything else has been burnt to a cinder and the paper contents of the folders have been reduced to white ash,” the documents alleged to concern Galloway were unmarked, Blair wrote.

Aware of how unlikely this scenario appears, Blair admits, “Why the contents of the room with the box files survived is a mystery. Its walls are blackened by fire, yet most of the folders are intact.”

One document is said to refer to a meeting between the MP and an Iraqi intelligence officer in December 1999, in which the agent reports that the two had discussed handing some *three million barrels of oil every six months* over to Galloway's anti-sanctions campaign. Another document records that this alleged request was circulated to top officials in Hussein's regime, including Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz. On April 23, the *Telegraph* published a letter that it also said was discovered that supposedly conveyed Hussein's instructions that Galloway's request should be rejected.

The attack on Galloway has since been joined by the government. Labour's Attorney General Lord Goldsmith announced that he is to conduct a “fact-finding” mission into allegations that Galloway spent charitable donations to his “Mariam Appeal” on his travels to the Middle East. The appeal was set up to fund the treatment of a little Iraqi girl who contracted leukaemia, but was broadened into a political campaign against sanctions and in support of the Palestinian *intifada*.

Though ostensibly a response to a letter from a “member of the public”, the source of the accusations is the *Times* newspaper, published by Rupert Murdoch. The *Times* also drew attention to Galloway associate and Jordanian businessman Fawaz Zureikat, the

coordinator for the appeal and one of its main donors, implying that he used his relations with the Iraqi regime to negotiate oil contracts.

Finally on April 24, the *Christian Science Monitor* in the United States claimed to be in possession of documents proving that Galloway had received £6.3 million from Saddam Hussein, which is said were found by an unnamed Iraqi general in a house used by Saddam's son, Qusay.

The *World Socialist Web Site* holds no political brief for Galloway and is not obliged to vouch for his innocence of the many charges levelled against him. His campaign against US/UK policy towards Iraq has nothing in common with a genuine socialist opposition to imperialism and has focused on efforts to secure finances from various Arab regimes, including Baghdad.

But no one should allow their distaste for the MP's political opportunism to be manipulated by right-wing forces who only desire to vent their hatred of all those who opposed the military assault on Iraq.

Any independent observer will recognise that the apparent discovery of the documents being used to indict Galloway is politically fortuitous for Blair's government—which has faced sustained criticism for its failure to uncover Iraq's “weapons of mass destruction” at a time when large-scale anti-US protests are taking place throughout the country.

The accusations against Galloway not only temporarily drove such stories into the background. More importantly, they offer a chance to discredit the entire antiwar movement while intimidating others who took a stand against Blair's warmongering by implying that it was led by stooges of Saddam Hussein.

In an April 22 article entitled “Saddam's little helper” the *Telegraph* itself crowed:

“It is hard to think of a graver setback to the British antiwar movement. How would you feel if you were one of the many well-meaning peace protesters who had followed Mr. Galloway's lead? What would your emotions be if you had given money to his Mariam Appeal, thinking that you were paying to treat a young Iraqi girl for leukaemia and wondering now how your money had been used?”

“For months, antiwar campaigners have been imputing the basest of motives to their adversaries. The whole campaign, they argued, was really about money and oil.

“Yet what if it turns out that they, rather than their opponents, had hidden pecuniary motives? What if it was actually the supporters of the campaign who were acting on behalf of Iraqi civilians, while antiwar activists—or at least their leaders—were acting for profit?”

It should be noted that the attack on Galloway began long before questions were raised over his possible financial relations with the

Ba'athists. For weeks the *Sun* newspaper, for example, has been referring to the Scottish MP as a traitor following an interview with Abu Dhabi television at the beginning of April in which he urged Iraqis to fight their "foreign invaders" and suggested that Blair's pursuit of an "illegal war" could lead him to be tried for war crimes. He added, "The best thing British troops can do is to refuse to obey illegal orders."

The Labour Party considered whether it could expel Galloway from the party for his remarks, but reportedly had decided that this was not possible. A major consideration in not proceeding against Galloway was the government's concern that this would mean addressing his charge that Blair had waged an illegal war.

Following the recent media outrage, however, an investigation into Galloway's removal has been reopened. And the Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir David Calvert-Smith, has been approached by the chairman of Forces Law, Justin Hugheston-Roberts, asking that Galloway be prosecuted under the Incitement to Disaffection Act of 1934.

According to some reports, he looks set to lose his regular column for a Scottish newspaper and the £70,000 per annum it brings him.

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Galloway thus faces political and financial ruin and a possible two years in prison—a fate that would provide a stark warning to any one who opposes the war plans of the Blair government and Britain's ruling elite.

On the documents, Galloway told Radio 4's *Today* programme: "I am not saying they are forgeries. I am saying they could be forgeries and that their provenance is extremely suspicious." He has raised the possibility that some of his associates "traded on my name" without his knowledge, but continues to insist that "these allegations that I myself took sums of money from the government then ruling Iraq are not only untrue but lies on a fantastic scale."

In any event, the onus of proof rests with his accusers. After all, the documents are meant to have survived both bombing and the activities of looters and arsonists, only to lie undiscovered by US Army or CIA personnel who one must assume would demonstrate at least a passing interest in the contents of the Iraqi Information Ministry.

If the documents indeed exist, the most obvious explanation is that they were planted for Blair to find. The newspaper itself acknowledged that it had only found the documents because of an inexplicable failure on the part of the intelligence services:

"It would seem self-evident that those seeking Saddam's weapons of mass destruction would want first sight of what documents had survived at the dictator's intelligence HQ, the foreign ministry and the agriculture department (vital for biological and chemical technology). However, no attempts were made to seal off these departments, or even to give them a minimal military guard."

To claim that the hundreds of CIA and MI6 operatives in Baghdad were too incompetent to discover what Blair and a handful of other journalists did in a casual search will convince no one. It is made all the more implausible because the *Telegraph* has kept adding politically strategic revelations made in documents its reporters have discovered.

In the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, the *Telegraph* claims to have found proof of collusion between French diplomats and agents from the Iraqi Intelligence Service, the Mukhabarat; documents showing that an Al Qaeda envoy visited Baghdad for talks with Iraqi intelligence in 1998; proof that Russia's intelligence services spied on Blair during private

meetings on the war and that "Germany's intelligence services attempted to build closer links to Saddam's secret service during the build-up to war last year."

These discoveries are so made to order for the supporters of war that the *Mirror* newspaper's political editor, Paul Routledge, was moved to express his doubts that such "top-secret files" were "just lying around on the floor waiting for eagle-eyed reporters to pick them up and phone their news editor".

"Even more amazingly," Routledge added, "every single document points the guilty finger at Saddam's regime and those who questioned the Anglo-American war against Iraq.... It could be that the security services, in this business up to their ears, have had a hand."

A statement from Galloway's lawyers, London-based Davenport Lyons, questions the provenance of the documents being cited by the *Monitor*. It notes that the newspaper "accepts that the authenticity of the documents could not be verified", before continuing, "George Galloway did not visit Iraq before 1993 and has never met Qusay Hussein or even heard of any of the other people whose names are supposed to be mentioned in the documents. These documents are also inconsistent with the other documents referred to in the press recently."

This would not be the first time that the government and its supporters have sought to extract themselves from political difficulties by resorting to black propaganda and lies. The road to war was paved by a systematic campaign of disinformation, which included the so-called dossiers of evidence produced by the Blair government, subsequently proven worthless, as well as countless newspaper columns whose contents were dictated by the political requirements of the Pentagon and Whitehall.

In at least one instance, documents cited as authoritative proof of Iraqi wrongdoings were shown to be deliberate forgeries. A series of letters between Iraqi and Niger officials showing Iraq's interest in obtaining nuclear materials from Niger was supplied by Britain to US intelligence officials and cited extensively by both London and Washington. When they came into the possession of the United Nations Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) they were found to be transparent and amateurish fakes that would not have fooled anyone.



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