

Britain: Labour expels antiwar MP Galloway

Chris Marsden
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George Galloway, MP for Glasgow Kelvin, has been expelled from the Labour Party for the sole crime of opposing the Blair government's participation in the US-led war against Iraq.

Galloway faced five charges before the three-person panel from Labour's National Constitutional Committee (NCC) under rule 2A.8 of the party's rule book, which states: "No member of the party shall engage in conduct which in the opinion of the NCC is prejudicial or in any act which in the opinion of the NCC is grossly detrimental to the party."

On March 28, Galloway gave an interview to Abu Dhabi television in which he is accused of inciting Arabs to fight British troops. On April 1, he gave an interview to ITV news in which he was accused of inciting British troops to disobey orders. He is also accused of calling on voters not to back Labour candidates in Plymouth, of threatening to fight for election as an independent, and of supporting an antiwar candidate against Labour in Preston.

The latter charges were made to fill out the dossier, with the main accusations being his supposed urging of Arabs to fight the US and British invasion forces and inciting British troops to disobey orders.

Galloway denied all the charges, preparing a 50-page deposition to the NCC tribunal stating that he was being singled out for punishment for voicing legitimate opinions shared by many in the party. After a two-day hearing, however, the tribunal acquitted him of only one charge—of urging voters in Plymouth not to back Labour. He was found guilty by unanimous verdict of inciting Arabs to fight British troops, inciting British troops to defy orders, threatening to stand against Labour candidates, and backing an antiwar candidate. The media and public were barred from the tribunal, and the transcript has not yet been published.

Galloway responded by denouncing the proceedings as a "kangaroo court" whose judgment had been "written in advance in the best traditions of political show trials".

His verdict on the tribunal is correct. Even the charges against Galloway do not stand up to scrutiny. In the Abu Dhabi TV interview, which earned him the hatred of the party leadership, he had only asked rhetorically, "The Iraqis are fighting for all the Arabs. But where are the Arab armies?" He went on to effectively rule out the possibility of Arab military resistance, proposing an oil embargo instead.

Galloway said of this charge and the supposed "crime" of

inciting troops to disobey orders, "I didn't call on Arabs to attack the British army, I called on British soldiers to disobey illegal orders which is an obligation on all armies since the Nuremberg trials."

In any case, Galloway was entirely correct to support resistance by the Arab peoples to an illegal invasion by the world's most powerful imperialist power and its British ally Blair. And his calling on troops to disobey what were automatically illegal orders, given that the war against Iraq was an illegal war of aggression, is entirely supported by the Geneva Conventions.

Galloway's expulsion even flouts the party's own rule book. As *The Guardian's* Seamus Milne pointed out before the verdict, the accusations against him "relate not to anything he has done, but only to what he is alleged to have said... [S]ince the party rules specify that no member can be disciplined for the 'mere holding or expression of opinions,' New Labour apparatchiks have conjured up a new category of opinions so inflammatory they go beyond 'mere expression.'"

One need not whitewash the witchhunt mounted against the left-wing Militant Tendency leadership that led to several expulsions in the 1980s, or the expulsion of Ken Livingstone MP in 1998, to acknowledge this point. In both cases, those expelled were at least accused of practical breaches of the party's constitution—of operating an entryist faction in the first case and standing against an official Labour candidate in the other. Galloway's is a thought crime of Orwellian mould.

Galloway is considering as one option legal action against the Labour Party at the High Court in London precisely because, he says, "Rule 2a (8) guarantees that a member may not be expelled for the mere expression of their views and opinions. I've not been accused of having done anything, I've been accused of saying something they didn't like."

More generally, regarding the significance of his expulsion, Galloway commented, "Mr. Blair's response to the disaster of the war is to attack those who stood against the war and to root them out of British politics."

His remarks were echoed by the veteran leader of the party's left wing, Tony Benn, who said, "The message that is sent out is: if you are in favour of the UN charter and peace, then don't be a member of the Labour Party because if you do, you might be expelled."

This accurately sums up the general aim and underlying

message of the government. But no one should expect Galloway, Benn or any representative of the dwindling left wing to provide an effective opposition to Blair. Even now, Galloway has not called for workers to leave the Labour Party and wage a political struggle against Blair. There was talk that he might resign and force a by-election to stand against Labour, but he has not yet done so. Instead, he is reportedly concerned not to test the divided loyalty of his supporters by forcing them to effectively resign by backing his candidacy. And Benn has famously declared that he will die in the Labour Party.

The only legitimate response to Galloway's expulsion is for working people to draw the most fundamental conclusions regarding the political character of the Labour Party to which Galloway has been a loyal member for 36 years. In targeting the Glasgow MP for his antiwar stance, Labour is acting as the political representative of a powerful financial oligarchy intent on cowing and intimidating all of its political opponents and even proclaiming the holding of dissenting views to be criminal. Galloway has said that the transcript of his interview with Abu Dhabi TV was given by the Labour Party to the *Sun*, owned by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, precisely in order to discredit him at a time when the public was overwhelmingly opposed to the war: "They gave them the transcript; not only do I know that, but the *Daily Record* was given it first and the editor rang me to say they had been given it by the Labour Party and wouldn't be using it... The transcript comes from MI6."

The *Sun* used the transcript to launch a campaign against Galloway, branding him as a "traitor." The press witchhunt continued when the *Daily Telegraph* claimed to have uncovered documents in a bombed-out building in Iraq indicating that the MP had received money from Saddam Hussein's regime. Labour's attorney general Lord Goldsmith then announced that he was conducting a "fact-finding" mission into allegations that Galloway spent charitable donations to an appeal set up to fund the treatment of an Iraqi girl who contracted leukemia. On April 24, the *Christian Science Monitor* in the US joined in by claiming to be in possession of documents proving that Galloway had received £6.3 million from Saddam Hussein. The *Monitor* was later forced to apologise for its story and admit that its documents were forgeries.

The *World Socialist Web Site* responded to the attacks on Galloway by explaining on May 3 that the aim of the witch-hunt was "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."

(<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/may2003/gall-m03.shtml>)

On May 6, Galloway was suspended from the Labour Party. We responded by writing on May 21, "Blair made plain his contempt for public opinion, when in the run-up to the war he blithely dismissed the 2 million-strong antiwar protest in

London on February 15, and insisted that 'history' would be his judge, as opposed to the electorate.

"Now contempt has been replaced by an active suppression of dissenting views that will not stop with Galloway. His fate is meant to intimidate all opponents of the government, both within the party and in the population at large." (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/may2003/gall-m21.shtml>)

Galloway's expulsion confirms the prescience of these warnings and Labour's readiness to trample on democratic rights in order to defend the interests of its big business backers. His fate is indeed a warning that the government is now intent on actively suppressing all dissenting views.

Former cabinet minister Robin Cook, who resigned over the war, has demonstrated his political cowardice in supporting the party leadership's claim that Galloway's expulsion is a special case—telling Scotland's *Daily Record*, "I have had no pressure on me from within the party to stop making the case against the war. Nor have the 130 Labour MPs who voted against the war." But make no mistake that only those who toe the line will be safe in the future. There are already reports that Glenda Jackson MP could face disciplinary action for calling for Blair's resignation over Iraq.

More important still, the government's draconian antiterrorism laws have already been used by the police last month to arrest 144 people protesting against an arms fair in London. The civil rights group Liberty has challenged the use of emergency powers contained in sections 44 (1) and 44 (2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 as illegal. Liberty's court action has revealed that on two occasions—from August 13 for 28 days and from September 11 for 28 days—the Metropolitan Police had unrestrained power to treat everyone in London as a terrorist, and stop, search and hold them without cause or reasonable suspicion. The Met. has already declared that the provisions of the legislation could be used against those demonstrating against President Bush's November 19 state visit to Britain, which will be policed by up to 250 armed officers under the leadership of London's head of antiterrorist and security operations, David Veness.

Under the rule of the Blair government, all opponents of war are to be treated as traitors and potential terrorists. The grave dangers this poses to democratic rights cannot be answered by any partial protest against Labour, but only through a political break with the party of the oligarchy and the building of a genuine socialist party by the working class.



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