

Canada bars British anti-war MP Galloway

Keith Jones
23 March 2009

Canada's Conservative government has barred British anti-war MP George Galloway from entering the country on the grounds he represents a threat to Canada's "national security."

Galloway learned through an "exclusive" posted last Friday on the website of the *Sun*, a Rupert Murdoch-owned British tabloid, that Canadian authorities have resolved to prevent him from entering Canada.

Galloway, who was kicked out of the British Labour Party in 2003 for opposing the Blair Labour government's leading role in the illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq, had been scheduled to speak in Toronto March 30 as part of a North American "break the siege" lecture tour. Last week, Galloway led a convoy that "broke" the punitive Israeli economic blockade of the Gaza Strip, turning over 12 ambulances, a fire engine, and more than a million British pounds of humanitarian aide to Gaza's democratically-elected, Hamas-led government.

The exclusion of Galloway is an outrageous attempt on the part of Canada's government to muzzle a fierce critic of the Iraq war, the US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan, and the recent Israeli invasion of Gaza. It is also part of wider attempt by the government and Canada's corporate elite to portray all opposition to the leading role that the Canadian military is playing in the Afghan war as disloyal, if not pro-Taliban, and all criticism of Israel's subjugation of the Palestinian people as anti-semitic.

Conservative Immigration Minister Jason Kenney has claimed that the decision to exclude Galloway was not taken by him, but rather by the Canada Border Services Agency, which works under his ministry's direction.

That Canada's border police would decide to bar a sitting British MP from Canada and, moreover, leak its decision to a British tabloid without suggestion from the minister is, to say the least, highly implausible.

Be that as it may, Kenney and the Conservative government have unreservedly defended the decision to bar Galloway, with Kenney proclaiming that he will not exercise his prerogative as minister to overturn the border agency's decision and vehemently denouncing Galloway's politics.

"I believe that folks who are supporting or promoting and helping terrorist organizations are not needed to visit Canada," declared Kenney. "Last week," continued the minister, Galloway "publicly called for a coup d'etat in Egypt and the overthrow of the government there, while at the same time delivering aid and resources to Hamas, which is a banned, illegal terrorist organization."

Kenney's chief aide, Alykhan Velshi, told a reporter via e-mail, that the government will not "provide special treatment to a man who brags about giving 'financial support' to Hamas, a banned terrorist organization in Canada, or who offers sympathy for Canada's enemies in Afghanistan."

"I'm sure Mr. Galloway has a large Rolodex of friends in regimes elsewhere in the world willing to roll out the red carpet for him. Canada, however, won't be one of them."

In correspondence with another reporter, Velshi said that Galloway "was deemed legally inadmissible to Canada under section 34(1) of our Immigration Act." That section says that foreign nationals can be excluded on "security grounds" from Canada for, among other things, engaging in "subversion of a democratic government," "engaging in or instigating the subversion by force of any government," "engaging in terrorism," or for simply "being," in the government's view, "a danger to the security of Canada."

Velshi refused to specify which grounds the government claims relate to Galloway or why. Thus, further underscoring the arbitrary and anti-democratic character of the decision to exclude him.

Galloway has vowed to fight the Canadian government's decision to bar him from the country and rebutted the Conservatives' attempts to smear him as a terrorist accomplice.

Galloway said the Canadian government's exclusion order made a mockery of the claims of promoters of the US-NATO intervention in Afghanistan that they are defending freedom.

"This decision, gazetted in Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* ...has further vindicated the anti-war movement's contention that unjust wars abroad will end up consuming the very liberties that make us who we are."

Galloway, who is the lone MP for an anti-war, reformist party known as Respect, likened the decision to deny him entry to Canada to Kenney's recent decision to cut off funding for Canadian Arab Federation English-language classes, because the CAF has had the temerity to criticize the government's fervent support for the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the recent pummelling of Gaza and has called for Canada to recognize that Hamas and the Lebanese political party and militia Hezbollah are "legitimate organizations."

"These are wedge issues," said Galloway, "being created by a neo-con Bush-ite" He continued, "Flagwaving, or in the case of Canada, shroud-waving of the brave Canadian soldiers who gave their lives for this failed policy of the Canadian government [in Afghanistan] is despicable beyond words."

Numerous civil liberties groups, the social-democratic NDP and even Michael Ignatieff—the Liberal leader of the Official Opposition, who in recent weeks has been competing with the Conservatives as to whose party is the biggest apologist for the Israeli war crimes in Gaza—have denounced the Conservative decision to bar Galloway.

The barring of Galloway is part of a pattern in which the Conservative government has been targeting for exclusion from Canada those whom it deems to be on the left. In 2007, African National Congress leader Winnie Mandela was denied entry into Canada on the grounds that she had a criminal record. And in January, Bill Ayers, the former Weathermen leader and current day "distinguished professor" at the University of Illinois (Chicago), whose name was dragged through the mud as part of the US Republicans' failed attempt to derail Barack Obama's election campaign, was

prevented from addressing a Canadian university audience.

The Canadian government has also been systematically deporting war-resisters—that is US soldiers who have deserted and fled to Canada so as not to be party to war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile last week the war criminal George W. Bush was given an enthusiastic reception by the corporate elite of Calgary, home to Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper.



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