

Oppose Twitter's act of censorship against George Galloway!

Robert Stevens
11 April 2022

George Galloway, the former Labour Party MP and current leader of the Workers' Party of Britain, is the latest high-profile figure to have fallen victim to the widespread censorship of anti-war voices by social media platforms Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and the Google search engine.

On April 6, Twitter updated Galloway's status with the designation "Russia state-affiliated media" directly under his name and handle. Every tweet issued by Galloway since includes the designation.

This is an act of censorship. Twitter, which has released no information as to how many people have had the designation applied, explains, "In the case of state-affiliated media entities, Twitter will not recommend or amplify accounts or their Tweets with these labels to people." The tweets from such designated accounts are removed from Twitter's "Top Search" function.

The practice has been in place since 2020 and was stepped up this February as war broke out in Ukraine. Yoel Roth, Twitter's head of site integrity, announced that the company was adding labels even to tweets that share links to what it designated Russian state-affiliated media websites, aiming to "significantly reduce the circulation of this content".

Galloway has been targeted not merely because of his prior involvement with Russian state-owned news sites Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik, but because of his long-standing opposition to imperialist wars and criticisms of NATO's 30-year encroachment on Russia. After serving as an elected MP for 16 years, Galloway was expelled from the Labour Party in 2003 by Tony Blair for his opposition to the invasion of Iraq. He won two subsequent elections to parliament in constituencies in Bradford and London, largely based on his opposition to wars supported by Britain's

political establishment.

Galloway has a large social media following, including over 416,000 on Twitter. In the few days since Twitter's attack on him, his following on the platform grew by almost 10,000. He has a long career in broadcasting, having been employed by Talksport and talkRadio (UK commercial radio stations owned by Wireless Group) as far back as 2006. In 2019, Russian-owned station Radio Sputnik began to host his "The Mother of All Talk Shows" phone-in programme.

Galloway appeared on RT and Sputnik up until March. On March 2, as the censoring of media content from Russia intensified, both were taken off air in the UK as a result of European Union sanctions. The sanctions cut RT and Sputnik's feed from satellite companies in France and Luxembourg to Britain's Sky, Freesat and Freeview. RT was simultaneously excised from the main social media platforms Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok and Google's YouTube and Google News search. On March 18, UK broadcasting regulator Ofcom banned RT with immediate effect.

Galloway's Sputnik-hosted show had therefore been off the air for weeks when he had the designation added, prompting him to threaten Twitter with legal action. He tweeted, "Dear @TwitterSupport, I am not 'Russian State Affiliated media'. I work for NO #Russian media. I have 400,000 followers."

Referring to his Workers' Party of Britain, created as a personal political vehicle staffed by a group of ardent Stalinists, he continued, "I'm the leader of a British political party and spent nearly 30 years in the British parliament. If you do not remove this designation I will take legal action."

In reply to right-wing detractors who supported the designation, Galloway pointed out basic facts showing its fraudulent and anti-democratic basis. He wrote:

- “The show and the channel have been closed down by the government mate. It’s a criminal offence in the UK to work for RT. Moreover, when I did present on RT my Twitter account had no such designation. Or do the facts not matter to you?”

- “RTUK has been closed down by the government ma’am and my show with it. In the name of free speech of course. Hence I have no connection to Russian state media and cannot be designated as such. Not least because when I did present for them I had no designation.”

- “But I don’t have any links to RT Peter. It would be a criminal offence in the UK so to do. Does the truth not matter to you?”

- “But I don’t work for it [Sputnik]. Or for RT. Neither exists in the UK. Indeed it would be a criminal offence to work for either in the UK. Which part of that don’t you understand?”

On Saturday, Galloway gave Twitter seven days to rescind the designation or be sued at the High Court for defamation, libel and harassment. Galloway employed the services of Ireland-based human rights lawyers KRW Law.

KRW tweeted to Twitter and its newly announced largest shareholder Elon Musk, the richest person on the planet, “Legal action has begun.” A further tweet, including a statement, read, “Following @twitter designation of ‘Russia state-affiliated media’ to our client @georgegalloway, we have provided notice of his intention to institute proceedings for breach of his personal data rights, defamation / libel and harassment.”

Solicitor Kevin Winters wrote, “The application of the label is unlawful both as a matter of data protection law and otherwise unlawful being defamatory/libellous, an intrusion into our client’s private life because it is a serious attack on his personal/professional integrity and reputation and because the application of the label interferes with his right to freedom of expression through censorship”.

The attack on Galloway must be seen in the context of the social media giants’ broader crackdown on any voices that do not go along with the state-sanctioned narratives demonising Russia.

Just a few days previously, the WSWs wrote in opposition to YouTube’s March 27 removal, without any notice or explanation, of the entire six-year archive

of Chris Hedges’s “On Contact” show. Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, author, lecturer and former *New York Times* correspondent.

He was caught in a vast dragnet organised by YouTube aimed at silencing dissenting, anti-war voices. According to a March 11 article in online newspaper *TechCrunch*, “YouTube said that since its last update on Ukraine-related actions, it has removed more than 1,000 channels and over 15,000 videos for violating a number of policies—including its hate speech policy, policies around misinformation, graphic content and more.”

The purge of Hedges’s material was part of the shutdown of RT America, which saw the termination of another popular left-wing and anti-war programme, “Redacted Tonight” with Lee Camp. RT was closed in the US on March 3 and its 120 employees laid off at offices nationwide.

The rapidly expanding censorship of anti-war and anti-imperialist voices by social media platforms used by billions is being increasingly recognised and opposed by broad masses of the population. The WSWs noted last week that just before “his investments in the company had become public, Musk tweeted another survey that asked, ‘Free speech is essential to a functioning democracy. Do you believe Twitter rigorously adheres to this principle?’, to which more than 2 million people responded, with 70 percent of them answering, ‘No.’”

Notwithstanding our deep and irreconcilable political differences with Galloway, an inveterate opportunist, British nationalist, and admirer of Joseph Stalin, the Socialist Equality Party (UK) opposes the anti-democratic move against him. It is a precursor to an ever-wider rollout of censorship measures against the working class. We demand that his designation as “Russia state-affiliated media” is rescinded immediately and that all censorship of Galloway and his supporters’ views ended.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact