Canary and George Galloway de-banking: wartime censorship escalates

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The closure of bank accounts held by former MP George Galloway and the Canary media group marks a new stage of censorship, intimidation and repression against anti-war media in Britain. It takes place amid NATO's escalating military offensive against Russia, with the Burnham Labour government facilitating long-range missile strikes into Russian territory by Ukraine.

Galloway's Bank of Scotland accounts, held for 39 years, were closed on September 3. The accounts, which received his parliamentary and state pensions and paid his mortgage (also held with the bank), were closed without explanation or notice, leaving him unable to access funds and care for family members, including his 92-year-old mother.

Going public on X the next day, Galloway accused Lloyds Banking Group, which owns Bank of Scotland, of being in breach of the law, announcing that his solicitor Kevin Winters at KRW Law had issued a pre-action letter to Lloyds, a fact confirmed by KRW Law the following day.

On September 5, Galloway posted, "Who gave the order to @LloydsBank to close my 39-year account with Bank of Scotland without explanation or notice? We don't know. But in the light of my legal team's injunction upon them this afternoon on the preservation of evidence, we will find out."

He has pointedly asked Lloyds, "If the government told you to do so you must tell us."

A Bank of Scotland spokesperson said the bank does not close accounts based on political or personal beliefs and added that it could not comment on individual cases. Lloyds have sent Galloway a cheque for his frozen funds, but he has nowhere to deposit it.

Galloway has been elected to the UK parliament seven times since 1987, first for the Labour Party, then (following his expulsion by the Blairites for opposing the Iraq War) for the Respect Coalition (in 2005 and 2012), and most recently for the Workers Party of Great Britain when he took Rochdale from Labour—a result reflecting mass opposition to the Gaza genocide.

For most of the past year, since his questioning by UK counter-terrorism police at Gatwick Airport on September 25, Galloway has effectively been living as a political exile, based mainly in China and Russia. Galloway and his wife, Putri Gayatri Pertiwi, were both stopped by Counter Terrorism Command and questioned under Schedule 3 of the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act (2019) on their return to the UK from Moscow via Abu Dhabi.

Galloway was held for nine hours, had his phone and laptop confiscated, and was questioned about his views on Russia and China. The Workers Party of Great Britain reported they were "obstructed from providing legal support." Galloway and his wife were released without arrest or charge. The incident followed Galloway's trip to the Sobh International Media Festival in Iran in May 2025 to collect an award named after Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, and a visit to Moscow for the Russian Victory Parade.

Canary: publication suspended

The Canary, founded in 2015 by Corbyn acolyte Kerry Mendoza and until now Britain's most widely read left-wing publication, announced on September 4 that it was being debanked for a second time. Lloyds closed Canary's main bank account in June, leaving the publisher unable to pay staff wages and other running costs.

A statement posted on Canary's website explained, "Canary Media Limited has had another bank account blocked, resulting in yet another financial institution stopping us from accessing our money. We are currently awaiting a response from Metro, the bank responsible, for why it has done this. This has meant that once again, some staff were not paid for August."

The Canary experienced serious consequences following its de-banking in June, including the cessation of its just launched printed edition, wages being delayed, and pension payments being suspended to pay staff wages. At one point, the Canary website was unavailable for several hours because the direct debit used to pay for the service was shut down.

Canary underlined the broader climate of repression faced by anti-war media in Britain: "We have seen members of our team targeted through their social media accounts, including accounts being hacked, restricted, or removed. *Canary* workers have been arrested, with another being assaulted by a far-right Zionist at a protest. Two others were attacked by the Israeli Defence Forces in Southern Lebanon."

The second debanking "created circumstances in which we have been left with no responsible alternative but to suspend the *Canary's* operations with immediate effect."

De-banking: targets the left

In 2023, NatWest subsidiary Coutts bank faced a media and political backlash after it debanked Reform UK leader Nigel Farage. NatWest initially claimed it closed his account because he didn't meet Coutts' £1 million minimum balance threshold. But documents Farage obtained via a subject access request showed he was debanked for political reasons. Dame Alison Rose, NatWest CEO, was forced to resign after leaking confidential information about Farage's account to the BBC.

The debanking scandal prompted a Financial Conduct Authority review of how banks handle politically exposed persons, and new legislation took effect in April this year. For accounts opened on or after 28 April 2026, banks must give a detailed, specific reason for closure and provide a minimum notice period (60–90 days, depending on contract terms). However, for accounts opened before 28 April 2026, banks are not required to explain why they closed the account.

Farage explored a private criminal prosecution against NatWest. In March 2025, Farage and NatWest settled the dispute. The bank apologised to Farage and paid an undisclosed sum in damages.

Repressive measures adopted by the ruling class against the far-right are always a test case for repression against the left. While Canary has been driven to the brink of bankruptcy and Galloway cannot access UK banking facilities, Farage has secured donations this past week from two British crypto-billionaires worth £72 million.

Money laundering regulations adopted by banks in 2017 include "tipping off" provisions that, in some circumstances, make it a criminal offence to disclose that a suspicious activity report has been made. Senior government officials and intelligence agencies can therefore provide information to trigger a debanking decision, knowing that such "tipping off" will remain secret.

In July, the National Union of Journalists issued a statement describing Lloyds' closure of Canary's bank account as "a disturbing precedent for press freedom in the UK".

On September 9, Novara Media reported that Lloyds Bank refused a mortgage to the mother of Palestine Action prisoner Leona Kamio due to "adverse media", also de-banking Leona while she was on remand.

The European Union (EU) is using similar de-banking to crush dissent. In June last year, Hüseyin Dogru from DIEM 25 reported, "the EU froze my bank accounts and banned me from travelling under the sanctions regime they rolled out following Russia's invasion of Ukraine." For reporting anti-genocide protests by students at Berlin's Humboldt University, Dogru's *.red* media platform was branded by the TAZ newspaper as a tool of Russia's "hybrid war".

Organisations affected by recent de-banking in Germany have included Mehring Verlag, the publishing house of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP).

Alos impacted are Rote Hilfe (Red Aid) a left-wing legal-aid/solidarity organisation; Letzte Generation ("Last Generation") a climate activist group; and the German Communist Party.

The most far reaching attack on political anti-war activity is the sentencing of 27-year-old Bogdan Syrotiuk to 15 years' imprisonment for six articles he wrote for the *World Socialist Web Site* opposing the NATO-provoiked war in Ukraine and calling for the international unity of the working class against the capitalist regimes of Zelensky and Putin. The Zelensky regime had already banned the WSWS.