

George Galloway

A factsheet

GEORGE Galloway is entitled to due process. If he is to be condemned for his advocacy of British soldiers refusing orders in the war, or his denunciation of Bush and Blair, then we are proud to be equally condemned. The *Telegraph* and the *Sun* are vile Tory rags. Tony Blair is a warmonger and a hard-faced enemy of the working class. But none of that settles the question of the proper socialist attitude to George Galloway. Our enemy's enemy is not our friend.

Some of us have been at war politically with Galloway for the last decade. An editorial in *Socialist Organiser*, predecessor of *Solidarity*, on 27 January 1994, denounced Galloway under the headline, "The old left continues to rot", and called for his local Labour Party to deselect him.

No-one on the activist left considered him much of an ally until recently. His standing as a "left-winger" is based almost entirely on his stance in the Iraq war. Just how left-wing that really was, we shall see, but for sure he has no great reputation for leftism on other issues.

To tie the Socialist Alliance to George Galloway can only amount to disrupting the positive achievements of the Alliance so far for the sake of a catchpenny momentary popularity. No matter how many people can briefly be attracted by the Galloway bandwagon, for now, the idea that the left can be solidly united behind Galloway makes no sense.

Consider the facts.

1 Galloway has written: "If newspaper critics had focused on the incongruity of a left-wing campaigner obtaining support for his campaigning organisations from semi-feudal monarchies and businessmen such as Mr Zureikat, who represented some of the world's biggest companies in Iraq, that would have been a legitimate line of attack – though my defence would have been that needs must".

This is an admission that he obtained finance for his political activities from:

- (a) the semi-feudal monarchies of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia;
- (b) the Ba'athist-connected businessman Fawaz Zureikat.

According to Galloway: "Around £500,000 came from the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia gave £100,000 and... [of the rest] the bulk came from Zureikat".

His explanation for this? "*My defence would be that needs must*".

2 The Mariam Appeal was set up to help a little girl with leukemia and provide medical aid to Iraq. Galloway has admitted that the great bulk of the money raised for it was used for his political campaigning. "It was always a political campaign from the very beginning".

3 He says that he visited Iraq "maybe 100 times" between 1993 and 2002 (nearly once a month). Despite the sums involved, which would be huge for any sort of left-wing campaign, there is no record of the Mariam Appeal or his other vehicles, the Emergency Committee on Iraq and the Great Britain Iraq Society, organising much of our sort of campaigning activity: demonstrations, pickets, meetings, street stalls, and so on. The "political campaigning" consisted almost entirely of Galloway's visits to Iraq.

4 Galloway has not disputed reports from journalists who joined him on his flights to Baghdad that when there he spent most of his time with top officials of the dictatorship. To the claim by the *Daily Telegraph* that he met a junior Iraqi intelligence agent, he replies that he could have no call to do such a thing, since he had good connections with senior leaders of the regime. He says he spent Christmas Day 1999 with Saddam's deputy Tariq Aziz, going to church with him, having lunch at Tariq Aziz's house, and going to a party in the evening.

5 Galloway has claimed that in his contacts with Tariq Aziz he was trying to be helpful to the British government. "Galloway says the British government was aware of where he spent that Christmas [1999] and with whom. He says he privately told Peter Hain, the then minister at the Foreign Office for Middle East affairs, and suggested opening a channel of dialogue as a means of resolving the Iraqi crisis. 'Hain agreed we should start such a dialogue'. A month later, according to Galloway, Hain had begun briefing journalists that Galloway was 'close' to Tariq Aziz" (*Sunday Herald*). Hain denies Galloway's account.

6 Galloway has never refuted the allegation that he published the newspaper *East* with money paid out by the Pakistani governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in order to promote in Britain their political ends on the Kashmir question.

Those are the facts, admitted by Galloway, which stand even if the claims recently published by the *Telegraph* that he got money from the Iraqi government are entirely lies.

And what of the politics?

In the 1980s George Galloway was an old-fashioned Labour Party Stalinist of the *Morning Star* stripe. From that viewpoint he denounced Iraq. He condemned Saddam Hussein's massacre of Kurds at Halabja in 1988. He worked with a campaign which advocated sanctions against Iraq.

In the early 1990s he switched dramatically. By January 1994 the switch had gone so far that he stood before the man whom he and his associates in the 1980s had called a mass

murderer, and said to his face: "Sir... we salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability... We are with you. Until victory! Until Jerusalem!"

That was no naive enthusiasm from someone who had little chance to know better. It was a dramatic political switch. But that speech sounded the keynote for all that follows, to this day.

In 1998 he told the *New Worker*, paper of the New Communist Party, that "the mass organisations and the Ba'ath Party, which is extremely well-organised and deeply rooted now in Iraq... [have] high morale. High levels of motivation and mobilisation. A high spirit of resistance. Certainly an acute consciousness of who the real villains of the piece are..."

He condemned the left-wing Iraqi oppositionists whom he would have supported in the 1980s, talking of "the vicious effects of elements of the Iraqi opposition, who should know better. They've so poisoned the well of potential good-will to the Iraqi people in this country..."

"We have a situation where sections of the Iraqi Communist Party, for entirely understandable reasons – they've been subject to massive repression – have allowed themselves to be put into a pro-imperialist position... The Iraqi Communist Party and CARDRI (Campaign Against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq) have ended up defending imperialism".

Asked directly about his relations with Saddam Hussein by a friendly interviewer (IslamOnline.net, 19 December 2002), Galloway replied:

"I met Saddam twice in my life, once in 1993 and once nine years later, in 2002. In that time, I visited Iraq maybe 100 times. So I wouldn't like you to have the impression that I take tea regularly with the president of Iraq..."

"My position about Saddam Hussein is a very clear one. I never visited Iraq before the Gulf War. I would have been arrested on arrival if I had. I was a known opponent of the regime in Baghdad. I used to be demonstrating outside the Iraqi embassy when British ministers and businessmen were inside selling them guns and gas. I'm a founder member of the campaign for democratic rights in Iraq in the 1970s. So I have no connection whatsoever to the Iraqi regime."

"But my opposition to imperialism is greater than my opposition to the character of the Iraqi regime. You have to make these choices in life. Imperialism is the biggest criminal in the world. America is the biggest rogue state in the world. Britain is the auxiliary of a criminal rogue state. So there is no choice but to stand beside the people of Iraq. And if you stand beside them and travel to Iraq you can't avoid meeting their government. They are not a government I would myself choose, but they are the government of Iraq."

"We have a saying in English, that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. And Saddam Hussein has one eye".

So, as we have seen, Galloway became so friendly with the regime which previously he reckoned would have "arrested [him] on arrival" that he would have Christmas lunch with Tariq Aziz.

Framed up?

Is Galloway the victim of a frame-up by the *Daily Telegraph* and/or the British secret service? It is certainly possible that he is. We do not know.

The *Telegraph's* charges were based on documents allegedly found in a ruined office in Baghdad. Among other documents found there were correspondence with Edward

Heath, Robin Cook, and a cleric. Those people have confirmed that the correspondence was genuine.

Galloway admitted that the documents were likely to be genuine, but questioned the truth of their contents concerning himself. He has since retracted that admission that the documents were a genuine fund.

It is possible that the documents were forged and planted. On the other hand, no-one else prominently connected with the anti-war movement, not Tam Dalyell, not anyone, has had similar charges made against them. It is an incontestable fact that if Galloway is being framed, his admitted connections with the Iraqi government and admitted command of large funds for activities related to those connections made him eminently eligible for it. His admitted political relations and activities set the frame for this frame-up, if it is a frame-up.

Given that Galloway took money from the Emirates, the Saudis and Pakistan, why *wouldn't* he take money from Iraq? Would there be a difference *in principle* in *also* taking money from the Ba'athist regime with which he was so friendly?

So: the Iraqis didn't offer him money? Why not? Why wouldn't they give him all the money he would need in order to maximise his political work to help them?

They have a history of putting money in the way of those on the British left whom they think can help them. In the late 1970s they subsidised Gerry Healy's Workers' Revolutionary Party and its daily paper. Up to the time that the Saddam Hussein regime fell in April, they were financing the splinter-WRP that still publishes a daily *Newline*. Why wouldn't they have *offered* money to the British Parliament's "MP for Baghdad Central"? So he refused it? Why, when he took money from others?

Despite all that, our attitude should be that Galloway is "innocent until proven guilty"? Of course. We are also in favour of him having "due process" in the Labour Party, which has now summarily suspended him from membership on charges solely to do with what he said about the war.

But that cannot mean that we should also suspend *political judgement* about the facts that are known, and to which he has admitted, and about the probabilities.

"Needs must"?

Galloway has admitted that his wife drew £18,000 from the Mariam Appeal for help with care for the little girl the appeal was named after, and his chauffeur has claimed to have been paid by cheques from the Emergency Committee on Iraq. But if those expenditures can be squared, and if Galloway didn't use the money for his houses, cars, suits, and so on, but instead used it all for his "campaign" travels, does that make the whole business all right?

No, it does not. The first requirement of any socialist politics is independence from the wealthy classes, and you cannot be independent if you are paid by them.

Can "needs must" justify Galloway taking money from the UAE, the Saudis, Pakistan, and Zureikat, if not Iraq?

If it can, then it condemns us on the left for being finicky, fastidious and prissy for failing to use such sources of funds. Wouldn't such money make us much more effective? Couldn't we do much more with finance like the £800,000 Galloway said he had for his activities? Shouldn't the SWP, for example, stand condemned for failing to follow the example of the WRP of the late Gerry Healy, which for many years was able to publish a daily paper because it took funds from Arab governments?

So Galloway was wrong to run his politics on the basis of what he could seek and get funds for from the UAE, the Saudis, Zureikat and Pakistan? But maybe he was no worse than Arthur Scargill, and so we should regard his fault as minor and excusable?

That is a slander against Arthur Scargill, who led the greatest battle of the British working class in the second half of the 20th century (the miners' strike was no personal venture of Scargill's based on what he could get money for from Libya), and who stayed loyal to his teenage Stalinist version of "socialism". Scargill was and is a high-living trade union bureaucrat, but that is a very different matter.

Galloway is no worse than the old-style Stalinist politicians, with their funds from Moscow, and since genuine socialists at times sought united fronts with the Stalinist parties, so also we should unite with Galloway? No. Genuine socialists worked with the Stalinist parties for the sake of their working-class rank and file. They never compromised politically with Stalinism. As and when they could deal with the top Stalinist functionaries separately from the rank and file, they shunned and despised them. Leon Trotsky, for example, publicly called on the Mexican police to investigate the Central Committee of the Mexican Communist Party for its KGB links.

In the case of Galloway, there is no "working-class rank and file". There is just the individual, his personal enterprises, and their "heeds"...

Left-wing against the war?

But Galloway did oppose the Iraq war. Doesn't that entitle him to the solidarity of others who opposed the war? Is he not in fact being victimised for saying what all we opponents of the war said?

The question is, how much does Galloway's opposition to the war – from his own stated, admitted position of regular friendly relations with Tariq Aziz – have in common with left-wing, socialist opposition?

Last September, the Socialist Alliance National Council passed a resolution moved by a supporter of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* to oppose the war without to any degree backing the Iraqi regime. The SWP, the dominant force in the Alliance, largely ignored that decision, and preferred a stance of "victory to the [Ba'athist] resistance". That is a difference within the left.

Is it the same thing when someone with the ties to the Arab bourgeoisies and feudalists to which Galloway admits takes a superficially similar stance to, say, the SWP? Isn't it radically different?

Compare the different sorts of opposition to World War Two between September 1939 and June 1941. The Stalinists opposed the war and effectively made pro-Nazi propaganda ("Hitler wants peace"). The Trotskyists too opposed the war. Was there not a radical difference between them?

The Mosleyite fascists had a line very like that of the Communist Party, and superficially rather like that of the Trotskyists. Were not the Trotskyists – in all their shadings, and all their somewhat different renditions of their anti-war stance – right to shun both the fascists and the Stalinists?

Some pro-German Tories also opposed World War Two. One of them, Captain Ramsey, MP for Peebles, was interned in May 1940, along with 800 Mosleyites. Like the Trotskyists, Ramsey opposed the war. Should the Trotskyists have formed a popular front with Ramsey and the Stalinists and even the fascists?

The Trotskyists' opposition to the war had nothing in common with theirs! In those days, socialists – unlike many "revolutionaries" of today – defined themselves not negatively but positively, not by what they were against but by what they were for. They bracketed themselves with others according to what they were for, not according to what they were against.

Socialist opponents of World War Two in Britain were not interned. But no socialist opponent of that war thought that the fascists were being victimised because they represented an "extreme", outspoken variant of the socialist opposition to war. No socialist believed that they owed the fascists and pro-German Tories solidarity because they had Churchill as a common enemy.

Victimised?

Has Galloway been "victimised" just because he was "outspoken"? Many other MPs opposed the war. The leaders of the SWP played a bigger role in organising the anti-war movement than Galloway did. So, courtesy of the SWP, did the Muslim Association/ Muslim Brotherhood. *Solidarity* also called on soldiers not to obey orders.

Why would the supporters of war single out Galloway for attack? The point is that Galloway truly is singular. No-one else in the anti-war movement had been making almost-monthly visits to Baghdad, for friendly contact with top Ba'athist rulers there, for the previous nine years.

It is not denied that Galloway did, on an Arab TV station, call on other Arab armies to come to the aid of Saddam's. The equivalent of that in Britain early in World War Two would have been for some ecumenical fascist to ask: where is the army of that shirker Mussolini? Where are the Spanish legions of General Franco in Germany's hour of need? Italy did not join Germany until it was victorious in the West, in June 1940; Franco's Spain never entered the war.

What did Galloway mean, in his 1994 homage to Saddam Hussein, by his cry: "Until victory! Until Jerusalem!?" He was calling for the Arab states to unite with Saddam to conquer Israel. Such a stance has nothing in common with socialist and democratic solidarity for the Palestinian people. It is nothing other than Arab-chauvinist warmongering.

If Galloway had called on the US, British and Arab working classes, including the Iraqi working class, to rise and overthrow their rulers in opposition to British and US imperialism in the Arab world and elsewhere, then he would be entitled to the solidarity of socialists, whatever our incidental differences with him on the war. He did nothing of the sort. He acted before and during the war exactly as he would have acted if he were a member of the Iraqi Ba'ath party or a bought-and-paid-for agent of the Saddam regime. Even if we assume that he acted in that way for the purest motives, without thought of personal gain, his politics were such that socialists had nothing in common with him. We owe him no debt of solidarity.

Solidarity?

But in fact we have worked with him in the anti-war movement? And so we can't be "neutral" now that he is under attack?

The leaders of the anti-war movement, primarily the leaders of the SWP, chose to work with him. In fact Galloway should never have been allowed into the leadership of the anti-war movement. What he is politically has been

known with certainty for a decade. It could not be right for international socialists, who stand for the liberation of the workers of Iraq, to hold hands politically with Galloway, who simultaneously was holding hands with the quasi-fascists who ruled Iraq.

We are not obliged to follow the implications of the SWP leaders' opportunist mistake through to the bitter end of making it easy for such as the *Daily Telegraph* to smear the whole anti-war movement, because of Galloway, as being pro-Saddam or (and there isn't much difference) politically and morally indifferent to the reality of the fascist regime in Baghdad.

But isn't our sense of proportion here cock-eyed? Isn't calling Iraq fascist, or quasi-fascist, irrelevant to the issues raised by the war? Isn't comparing it with Hitler's Germany ridiculous? Iraq is a "semi-colonial" country, or at most a weak would-be regional power, and the USA is the world's hyperpower.

In fact, Iraq's place in the pecking order of imperialist and would-be imperialist powers has no bearing on whether we call it fascist or not. That was determined by the Saddam regime's relationship with its own population – with the working class and with the Kurdish national minority.

Saddam's Iraq was among the most vicious of totalitarian states. It did worse to the peoples of Iraq than Hitler did to either Germans or others before World War Two.

To argue that because Iraq is weak vis-a-vis the USA, *therefore* we don't need to define what the Ba'athist dictatorship was to "its own" people, is to substitute international relations for class politics.

Iraq was very weak compared to the USA. In World War Two Japan was much weaker than the USA. Trotsky wrote in advance that it could not possibly win a clash with the USA. Both Japan in Asia, and Italy in Europe, were very weak imperialist powers. They were imperialist by their relations with other peoples – Japan with China and Korea, Italy with Libya and Ethiopia. They were not less imperialist for being weak imperialisms, foredoomed in any clash with their superiors.

Iraq, while socially and structurally far in advance of Japan or Italy in the 1930s or 40s, was imperialist because of its relations with the Kurds and because of its attempts to conquer neighbouring areas in Kuwait and Iran. In fact, in the war, pro-Iraqis were in a position of siding with the weaker imperialism against the stronger. That is not consistent working-class anti-imperialism.

With Galloway, this was not a matter of confusion, or issues of political debate, such as we have between tendencies inside the Alliance. He worked politically on behalf of the smaller imperialism, on the basis of long-term friendly connections with its top leaders. He had nothing in common with working-class anti-imperialism.

Neither politically nor morally can we line up with George Galloway. Even if he is entirely innocent of the *Telegraph's* charges, political association with him is an enormous liability for socialists who would not under any circumstances take money from the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia.

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