BANNING BRITISH MP GEORGE GALLOWAY IS A CLUMSY, DANGEROUS MOVE BY JASON KENNEY

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Category: Opinions

Thomas Walkom, *The Toronto Star*, 21 March 2009

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Hezbollah, Israel & Lebanon (2006)

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But in a roundabout way it does illustrate how absurdly broad Canada's new anti-terror laws are and how dangerous they can be in the wrong hands.

Galloway's apparent crime was to deliver humanitarian aid last week to Gaza's Hamas government, which Canada deems a terrorist organization. But the 54-year-old Scottish MP's real sin was that he couldn't resist rubbing it in. Others have taken aid into Hamas-controlled Gaza, including a delegation of Canadians and Americans who crossed into the Palestinian territory on March 8.

As well, other Western politicians talk to Hamas. Last weekend, another British MP met the organization's top leader.

But the nattily dressed Galloway, known at home as Gorgeous George, is a relentless showboat, famous in his own country for appearing in a reality television show.

He praises Hamas extravagantly, calling on the West to recognize it as the legitimately elected government of Gaza. He castigates countries like Canada that are trying to isolate Hamas as the real criminals of the piece.

Expelled from the ruling Labour Party in 2003 for opposing the invasion of Iraq, he now sits in

Britain's parliament as the sole member of Respect, an anti-war grouping.

When London's Daily Telegraph accused him of taking rake-offs from Saddam Hussein, Galloway famously sued and won.

In short, he's egotistical, opinionated and – on the question of whether the West should deal with Hamas – probably correct.

But he's not by any stretch of the imagination a danger to this country. Even Kenney must recognize that.

Yet in terms of Canada's ludicrously broad immigration and anti-terror laws – which deem criminal anyone who advocates any kind of relationship with a proscribed organization – he's apparently inadmissible.

Even Canadian Jewish Congress head Bernie Farber, who staunchly opposes Galloway's views, argued in a newspaper piece published yesterday that the MP does have the right to speak here – although not to promote or raise money for Hamas.

(When I reached Farber yesterday afternoon, he said he now fully supports Kenney's decision to bar Galloway and believes the law was applied correctly.)

Sadly, the Galloway incident is part of a pattern. Earlier this week, Kenney said he would not renew $2.5 million worth of contracts that the Canadian Arab Federation uses to teach English to new immigrants.

Ostensibly he was punishing federation head Khaled Mouammar for calling on Canada to treat Hamas and another proscribed body, the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, as "legitimate organizations."

In fact, Mouammar is articulating a fairly common opinion among practitioners of realpolitik. Even the British government is reopening talks with Hezbollah, an organization it and Canada regard as terrorist.

The real reason for Kenney's snit may be that in January Mouammar called him a "professional whore," who supports Israel abroad to win Jewish votes at home.

Professional fool might be more apt. And a dangerous one. It's not unusual for politicians to pander for votes. But a government that limits freedom of speech on grounds as flimsy as those cited by Kenney is unconscionable.

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Canadians Finding Other Ways to Have Their Voices Heard

Judge denies Galloway's bid to enter Canada, by Kenyon Wallace, The Toronto Star, 30 March 2009

Controversial British MP George Galloway has been denied entry into Canada by a federal court

judge.

Justice Luc Martineau ruled today the Canada Border Service Agency did not err in its decision to prevent Galloway, who the federal government accuses of being a terrorist sympathizer, from engaging in a four-city speaking tour. The decision means Galloway will not be appearing in person to give an anti-war speech this evening in Toronto.

"The admission of a foreign national to this country is a privilege determined by statute, regulation or otherwise, and not a matter of right," Martineau wrote in his ruling. "In this respect Parliament has expressly given the CBSA officers legal authority to exclusively determine whether a foreign national who seeks to enter this country is admissible"

Yesterday, lawyers representing groups trying to bring Galloway to Canada argued before a Federal Court judge that an injunction should be granted allowing Galloway to enter Canada for four days pending a judicial review.

Supporters gathered at the Canada-U.S. border at Lacolle, Quebec cancelled a solidarity caravan today that would have escorted Galloway into Canada. Instead, Galloway awaited the federal court decision in New York City and will deliver his speech at Toronto's Metropolitan United Church tonight at 7 p.m. via live video broadcast.

"Who's next if Galloway is not allowed in? It seems like all our rights could be targeted," said Laith Marouf, one of Galloway's speech organizers. "This is a slippery slope and it seems like this is just the beginning. We will appeal and go to the highest court if need be."

The decision to deny Galloway entry was based on allegations that he provided humanitarian goods and $35,000 in aid money to Gaza's Hamas government during a recent convoy to the war-torn country. The Canadian government has banned Hamas and labelled it a terrorist group.

Last week Immigration Minister Jason Kenney criticized Galloway for his "odious" support of terrorism.

"But that's not the issue," Kenney said last week. "It has nothing to do with freedom of speech and everything to do with maintaining the integrity of our immigration act."

Galloway has no criminal record and has never been denied entry to any other country. Last week, he delivered a speech at New York's Columbia University in which he called for a single-state option in the Middle East.

Since he became a legislator 23 years ago, Galloway has never shied away from controversy.

He was suspended for 18 days by British Parliament's lower house in 2007 following accusations the 54-year-old Scottish MP concealed financial dealings with Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government. An investigation found that a charity he set up was partly funded by the Iraqi dictator.

The committee's conclusions followed a U.S. Senate investigation, which accused Galloway's political organization and his wife of receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars in UN oil-for-food allocations from Saddam.

Galloway called the report defamatory.