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UK: George Galloway can't and won't stop spreading Russian propaganda about Ukraine

George Galloway lied to millions that Olena Zelenska spent \$1m on jewellery

Thursday 16 May 2024, by [AL-OTHMAN Hannah](#), [LLOYD Will](#), [MENZIES Venetia](#) (Date first published: 11 May 2024).

The new Workers Party of Britain MP has spread disinformation about Olena Zelenska's 'Marie Antoinette' moment on social media – but in Rochdale his constituents haven't seen much of him

At the end of September last year a woman was said to have entered the Cartier Mansion on New York's Fifth Avenue, spent \$1.1 million on jewellery and then had a sales intern with whom she had argued fired.

The woman, it was claimed, was the Ukrainian first lady Olena Zelenska. Her New York spree came as her husband, President Zelensky, pleaded with the US Congress for continued support for Ukraine's war against Russia, and as thousands of Ukrainian soldiers fought and died on battlefields across the country.

George Galloway, the 69-year-old leader of the Workers Party of Britain, told millions of his followers in a video posted across social media platforms that this was a "Marie Antoinette moment".

Galloway falsely claimed that Olena Zelenska spent \$1 million in a New York Cartier store RASID NECATI ASLIM/ANADOLU/GETTY

"The wife of [Zelensky](#) spends one million dollars on Cartier jewellery in New York City," Galloway declared on October 5, 2023. "A Marie Antoinette moment that speaks volumes about her, about them, and about the way that this is all going to end."

The story was completely false. [Olena Zelenska](#) was in Canada on the day of her supposed shopping trip. The "intern" who made the claims was a beautician from St Petersburg.

But the claim, made in a video uploaded to YouTube on September 30 — one of many apocryphal stories of Ukrainian corruption that have circulated during the war — was boosted by Georgian and Russian Facebook accounts, as well as Kremlin-backed media such as Russia Today and [Lenta.ru](#)*.* Galloway was a presenter on Russia Today from 2013 until 2022.

Galloway, pictured in 2001, has been an outspoken supporter of the Palestinian cause since the 1970s ANDY WATTS FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

In October, Galloway told viewers of *Moats* (The Mother of All Talkshows) — his YouTube-hosted phone-in talk show — that his source for the story was "the respected United States publication The Nation".

The Nation, a monthly US political magazine founded in 1865, never ran a story about Olena Zelenska buying Cartier diamonds. The only publication called The Nation to run the story was a Nigerian daily newspaper based in Lagos and founded in 2006. This is not the first time Galloway, who returned to the House of Commons after winning the [Rochdale by-election](#) in February, has boosted dubious claims on his social media accounts.

Across Facebook, Twitter/X, YouTube, Patreon, TikTok, Rumble and Instagram, Galloway has amassed nearly 2.5 million followers. More than 5,000 videos have been uploaded to his YouTube account since July 2013. The only members of the shadow cabinet with more followers on Twitter/X than Galloway are Ed Miliband and [Sir Keir Starmer](#).

Much of Galloway's output on social media takes the form of video clips from *Moats*. The phone-in show is live-streamed on YouTube every Wednesday and Sunday evening. It was previously hosted by Radio Sputnik, a state-owned Russian broadcaster between 2019 and 2022. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, both Russia Today and Sputnik were banned in the UK and the EU. In a statement in May 2022, the EU said RT and Sputnik promoted "systematic information manipulation and disinformation by the Kremlin". YouTube blocked channels linked to RT and Sputnik across Europe.

Galloway, however, continued to broadcast *Moats* from his London studio, with all the links to Sputnik removed from the show's branding. And he has continued to promote false claims. On May 8 he told a caller that a Russian nuclear strike on British targets, including in London, "would be entirely lawful".

Following [terrorist attacks in Moscow](#) in March, Galloway said he had "four pieces of evidence that lead me to believe that the United States, its Nato allies and their puppet stump state Ukraine are, in fact, responsible for this massacre".

The comments were picked up by Rossiyskaya Gazeta, a newspaper published by the Russian government, which cited the MP as an expert discussing the attack. During an episode of *Moats* streamed on April 3, 2022, [Galloway](#) suggested the mass murder of Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war by the Russian armed forces in Bucha over the course of several days in March 2022 was a "false flag".

"I don't believe it because I haven't seen any evidence to make me believe it," Galloway said, "but I have seen lots of evidence that suggests it is indeed a false flag." He also repeated a claim made, and since debunked, that dead bodies in Bucha waved their hands and moved in the streets of the town. According to the UN Commission for Human Rights at least 73 civilians were killed unlawfully in Bucha.

Regular guests on *Moats* include Scott Ritter, a self-styled critic of American imperialism and a convicted sex offender, David Miller, a former University of Bristol professor who left his teaching post in 2021 after a dispute over his anti-Zionist views, and Mnar Adley, the founder of MintPress News, a website that supports President Assad of Syria. Many of Galloway's guests have been associated with Russia Today in the past.

Days before the war began in February 2022, Galloway told his YouTube audience that "it was a complete lie that Russia was preparing to invade [Ukraine](#)". He called the Ukrainian government a "coup government", and said the Donbas region "is currently being heavily attacked by the forces of the Ukrainian military including their fascist boot boys grouped around the Azov Battalion".

In the days following the invasion, Galloway boosted more false claims. One was a story about Oprah

Winfrey removing Tolstoy's *War and Peace* from her popular book club. Another was a fabricated story about a CNN journalist allegedly killed in Ukraine amid Russia's recent invasion.

Galloway claimed CNN had announced the death of the journalist twice, once during the Ukraine war, and several years previously during the Taliban's conquest of Afghanistan in August 2021. No such stories were ever posted by the news outlet. The screenshotted tweet that Galloway shared on *Moats* on February 27, 2022, came from an unverified Twitter account posing as CNN.

Galloway regularly appeared on the state broadcaster Russia Today, which was blocked across Europe by YouTube in 2022 YOUTUBE

Moats is a window into Galloway's [hard-left worldview](#). The MP once described the fall of the USSR as "the biggest catastrophe of my life" and said his ultimate hero was Che Guevara ("a person with poetry in his soul").

A Labour MP between 1987 and 2003, Galloway was expelled that year for his prominent opposition to the Iraq War. In 2006 he said in an interview with GQ magazine it would be "morally justified" for a suicide bomber to murder Tony Blair. Today he describes Keir Starmer as "so wooden that birds could nest in him".

His monologues on *Moats* often target Israel, which Galloway last week described as the "Ian Brady of states. It is the child killer of states." On October 8, the day after the Hamas-led attack on Israel, Galloway described the assault as a "prison break" and "the least unprovoked conflict in all history". He also boosted a false claim that Palestinian militants had been provided with weaponry "directly or indirectly from Ukraine". The claims were amplified by other pro-Russian social media users.

Play Video Galloway wins the Rochdale by-election

Galloway has wrapped himself in the Palestinian flag since the 1970s. It has been one of the major sources of his appeal in by-election victories he secured in Bethnal Green & Bow (2005), Bradford West (2012) and now Rochdale, after a 41.8-point swing from Labour, this time with his Workers Party of Britain.

When The Sunday Times visited Galloway's constituency office last week, on the edge of the town centre, there were no signs of life, with the metal shutters closed. There was no branding outside to even identify who rents the building. "He's never here," a woman working in a neighbouring business said. "The shutters are always down."

Galloway's shuttered constituency office in Rochdale, where he is now an MP THE SUNDAY TIMES

"I don't see him," Javed Iqbal, 72, said. He voted for Galloway having previously supported Labour "for the last 50 or 60 years". "He was the new one coming in so I thought I'd see what's going on, what he's doing for Rochdale," he said. "At the moment he's doing nothing," he added, but conceded, "it's only been a few weeks."

Elsewhere there is fierce support for Galloway. Outside a cash-and-carry on Milkstone Road in Rochdale, where okra and watermelons are piled high, at the mention of George Galloway's name a man turns, smiles, and gives a thumbs up. In this area of town more than 70 per cent of the population are Muslim, and 67 per cent are South Asian, according to the 2021 census data.

In this council ward, Milkstone and Deeplish, Minaam Ellahi won the seat for the Workers Party of Britain with 1812 votes earlier this month, unseating the previous Labour councillor Shahid Mohammed, who trailed behind with just 713 votes. Labour remains in overall control of the council.

Ellahi was one of two councillors elected here for the Workers Party, the other in Central Rochdale, where Labour was also defeated, and where the Muslim population sits at 65 per cent.

"I really support him," Dalil Rehman, 55, said, adding that "of course" he had voted for Galloway, "honestly, just for Palestine, because he is a voice for Palestine".

Galloway gained support in his successful Rochdale campaign through his outspoken views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
HOUSE OF COMMONS/UK PARLIAMENT/PA

The last few days have been tricky for Galloway and the Workers Party. The former England cricketer [Monty Panesar](#) was introduced to a crowd of Workers Party candidates and supporters at an event in Parliament Square on April 30 as the party's prospective parliamentary candidate for Ealing Southall. Galloway boasted on LBC: "I'm confident he [Panesar] will be bowling for us in parliament." But Panesar [left the party on Wednesday](#) after seven days. He directed repeated requests for comment to his agent. A wave of promised defections to Galloway from the Labour Party have yet to materialise.

However, he has promised to field a candidate in every English constituency at the general election. Senior Labour figures are reluctant to discuss him. In his victory speech at the end of February, Galloway warned Starmer: "You will pay a high price for the role that you have played in enabling, encouraging and covering for the catastrophe presently going on in occupied Gaza".

Afzal Khan, the Labour MP for Manchester Rusholme, beat Galloway in a 2017 by-election. He said that the party's predicament over Gaza is worse than the trouble it faced during the Iraq War. There were signs in the local elections that Labour did pay a price. Independent gains halted [Labour's advance](#) in wards in the north and middle of England with large Muslim populations.

Although Labour [seized the West Midlands mayoralty](#) from the Conservative Andy Street, Akhmed Yakoob won 70,000 as an independent backed by Galloway. Yakoob described him as "a good friend who's taught me a lot". He will stand in Birmingham's Ladywood constituency, held by the Labour MP Shabana Mahmood, at the general election.

Akhmed Yakoob won 70,000 votes in the contest for the West Midlands mayoralty
ANTHONY DEVLIN/GETTY IMAGES

Yakoob predicted that pro-Palestinian candidates would "run on independent tickets and then form an alliance" should they make it to the House of Commons. Whether Galloway will join them there depends on the voters of Rochdale. Arshad Hussain, 56, said she voted for him in the by-election having previously not voted in a long time.

However, she hasn't seen that much of him since. During his election "there was a lot of communication", but she said: "I haven't seen him around now ... that's a bit disappointing." Arshad can definitely see Galloway on YouTube, when *Moats* appears twice a week.

When asked for an interview earlier this week, Galloway responded: "Nooooo lol." He was contacted for comment.

Will Lloyd

Hannah Al-Othman

Venetia Menzies

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