

'Norm Coleman Is A Fool... A Drool-On-His-Tie Fool' Mr. Galloway Goes To Washington

By John Nichols
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Not an ideological nut case, not a partisan whack, not even a useful idiot -- just a plain old-fashioned, drool-on-his-tie fool.

'The Nation' - The Minnesota Republican senator who took Paul Wellstone's seat after one of the most disreputable campaigns in American political history has been trying over the past year to make a name for himself by blowing the controversy surrounding the United Nations Oil-for-Food program into something more than the chronicle of corporate abuse that it is. The US media, which thrives on official sound bites, was more than willing to lend credence to Coleman's overblown claims about wrongdoing in the UN program set up in 1996 to permit Iraq -- which was then under strict international sanctions -- to buy food, medicine and humanitarian supplies with the revenues from regulated oil sales. Even as Coleman's claims became more and more fantastic, he faced few challenges from the cowering Democrats in Congress.

But when Coleman started slandering foreign politicians, he exposed the dramatic vulnerability of his claims that the supposed scandal was much more than a blatant example of US corporations taking advantage of their powerful connections in Washington to undermine official US policy, harm the national interest and profit off the suffering of the poor.

The Senate investigation that Coleman sought regarding the Oil for Food program has already revealed that the Bush Administration failed to crack down on widespread abuse of the Oil for Food program by US energy companies, and that US oil purchases accounted for the majority of the kickbacks paid to Saddam Hussein's regime in return for sales of inexpensive oil. Indeed, the report concludes, "The United States (government) was not only aware of Iraqi oil sales which violated UN sanctions and provided the bulk of the illicit money Saddam Hussein obtained from circumventing UN sanctions. On occasion, the United States actually facilitated the illicit oil sales."

Instead of forcing the President, his aides and the executives of Bayoil, the Texas oil company that the report shows paid "at least \$37 million in illegal surcharges to the Hussein regime" -- money that helped the Iraqi dictator solidify his grip on power -- Coleman started to make wild charges about European officials such as British parliamentarian George Galloway.

The problem for Coleman is that Galloway is not a standard-issue American politician -- the kind who has nothing to say and says it poorly. He is a veteran of the rough-and-tumble politics of Glasgow and the equally rough-and-tumble politics of the British Parliament. In other words, Galloway comes from places where voters and politicians do not suffer fools. And anyone who has ever followed British politics knows that George Galloway has beaten every political challenge he has

faced -- even those posed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Galloway called Coleman's bluff and flew to Washington for a remarkable appearance before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. "I am determined now that I am here, to be not the accused but the accuser," Galloway announced as he stood outside the Capitol Tuesday. "These people are involved in the mother of all smokescreens."

The member of Parliament tore through Coleman's flimsy "evidence," issuing an unequivocal denial that began, "Mr. Chairman, I am not now, nor have I ever been an oil trader, and neither has anyone been on my behalf. I have never seen a barrel of oil, owned one, bought one, sold one, and neither has anybody on my behalf." He accused Coleman of being "remarkably cavalier with any idea of justice" and pointed out error after error in the report the senator had brandished against him.

For instance, Galloway noted that he had met Saddam twice -- not the "many" times alleged by the report. "As a matter of fact I have met Saddam Hussein exactly the same number of times that [Secretary of Defense] Donald Rumsfeld met him," said the recently re-elected British parliamentarian. "The difference is that Donald Rumsfeld met him to sell him guns."

For good measure, Galloway used the forum Coleman had foolishly provided to deliver a blistering condemnation of Coleman's war.

"Now, Senator, I gave my heart and soul to oppose the policy that you promoted. I gave my political life's blood to try to stop the mass killing of Iraqis by the sanctions on Iraq which killed one million Iraqis, most of them children, most of them died before they even knew that they were Iraqis, but they died for no other reason other than that they were Iraqis with the misfortune to born at

that time. I gave my heart and soul to stop you committing the disaster that you did commit in invading Iraq. And I told the world that your case for the war was a pack of lies," Galloway informed the fool on Capitol Hill.

"I told the world that Iraq, contrary to your claims, did not have weapons of mass destruction. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to Al Qaeda. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to the atrocity on 9/11, 2001. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that the Iraqi people would resist a British and American invasion of their country and that the fall of Baghdad would not be the beginning of the end but merely the end of the beginning..

"Senator, in everything I said about Iraq, I turned out to be right and you turned out to be wrong, and 100,000 people paid with their lives; 1,600 of them American soldiers sent to their deaths on a pack of lies; 15,000 of them wounded, many of them disabled forever on a pack of lies.

"If the world had listened to [UN Secretary General] Kofi Annan, whose dismissal you demanded, if the world had listened to [French] President Chirac, who you want to paint as some kind of corrupt traitor, if the world had listened to me and the antiwar movement in Britain, we would not be in the disaster that we are in today. Senator, this is the mother of all smokescreens. You are trying to divert attention from the crimes that you supported, from the theft of billions of dollars of Iraq's wealth," argued Galloway.

Then the Brit turned the tables on Coleman and steered the committee's attention toward "the real Oil for Food scandal."

"Have a look at the fourteen months you were in charge of Baghdad, the first fourteen months when \$8.8 billion of Iraq's wealth went missing on your watch. Have a look at Halliburton and other American corporations that stole not

only Iraq's money but the money of the American taxpayer," Galloway said.

"Have a look at the oil that you didn't even meter, that you were shipping out of the country and selling, the proceeds of which went who knows where. Have a look at the \$800 million you gave to American military commanders to hand out around the country without even counting it or weighing it. Have a look at the real scandal breaking in the newspapers today, revealed in the earlier testimony in this committee. That the biggest sanctions busters were not me or Russian politicians or French politicians. The real sanctions busters were your own companies with the connivance of your own Government."

(John Nichols's new book, *Against the Beast: A Documentary History of American Opposition to Empire* (Nation Books), was published January 30. Howard Zinn says, "At exactly the time when we need it most, John Nichols gives us a special gift -- a collection of writings, speeches, poems and songs from throughout American history -- that reminds us that our revulsion to war and empire has a long and noble tradition in this country." Frances Moore Lappé calls *Against the Beast* "brilliant! A perfect book for an empire in denial." *Against the Beast* can be found at independent bookstores nationwide and can be obtained online by tapping the above reference or at www.amazon.com.)

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