

Eyes Down: The Later Stages of the Gambling Bill

PHILIP COWLEY and MARK STUART*

Monday night, almost completely unreported by the media, the Government suffered five rebellions during the Report stage of the Gambling Bill, which saw a total of 29 Labour MPs defy the Government line.

During the debate, the Government faced a barrage of criticism from MPs representing either established seaside resorts (including Geraldine Smith in Morecambe and Sandra Osborne in Ayr) or those with substantial fun-fairs or travelling fairs in their constituencies (Lindsay Hoyle in Chorley and Dr Lewis Moonie in Kirkcaldy). There were other Labour MPs such as Frank Field and Kate Hoey simply opposed to the principle of the Bill. During the debate, Gwyneth Dunwoody commented that she was 'not at all clear where this tacky Bill has come from. During the short Third Reading debate, Win Griffiths said that while he recognised that the Government had moved significantly, 'once the genie is out of the bottle, it is difficult to put back', adding, 'The concept of responsible gambling is a contradiction in terms'.

The largest rebellion of the evening came at the Bill's Third Reading, when 24 Labour MPs (including two tellers) and six Conservatives vote against the Bill's Third Reading. (Both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat frontbenches abstained on Third Reading). The six Conservatives, all of whom have already voted against their party line at least once since 2001, were Michael Fallon, Douglas Hogg, Jonathan Sayeed, Bob Spink, and Ann and Nicholas Winterton.

Earlier on in the evening, two Labour MPs – Geraldine Smith and David Taylor – supported a Liberal Democrat amendment that would have insisted upon satisfactory evidence of identity, before entering a casino. (The Bill, as currently drafted, removes the need for people to produce ID).[†]

Six Labour MPs supported a Conservative amendment which sought to leave out clause 58 from the Bill – which gave the Secretary of State the power to ban children from using category 'D' machines like 'crane grabs' and 'penny falls'. Any would-be rebellion was limited after the Sports Minister, Richard Caborn, pledged to review carefully the need for the reserve powers included in clause 58, promising that the Government would report its conclusions and any alternative proposals to the House of Lords after the Bill's Third Reading.

Eight Labour backbenchers supported a Conservative amendment that would have further cut the number of mega-casinos in Britain from eight down to four. In response to the rebellion by 30 Labour MPs on Second Reading (1 November 2004), the Government had already given up its plans for 40 super-casinos in Britain. Instead, there will be a total of 24 casinos - eight casinos in each size category – small, medium and large, the so-called '888' solution.

* University of Nottingham. This paper draws on research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Further details are available from www.revolts.co.uk.

† The Liberal Democrat MP for Cheadle, Patsy Calton is currently recorded as voting with the Government (and against her Party) in the no lobby, although this might have been a mistake on the part of the MP or by *Hansard*.

Thirteen Labour MPs then supported a Liberal Democrat amendment that would have prevented the level of stakes and prizes being reduced for lower categories of gaming machines.

The rebellions involved a total of 29 different MPs, listed in the table below. All have rebelled before during this Parliament.

Labour rebels at the later stages of the Gambling Bill

<i>Name</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>Child ban</i>	<i>Four mega-casinos</i>	<i>Prizes</i>	<i>3rd Reading</i>
Barnes, Harry					X
Bennett, Andrew					X
Davidson, Ian					X
Davies, Denzil			X		X
Drew, David					X
Dunwoody, Gwyneth					X
Field, Frank			X	X	X
Fisher, Mark					X
Gibson, Ian					X
Griffiths, Win		X		X	X
Hamilton, David				X	X
Hoey, Kate		X		X	X
Hopkins, Kelvin					X
Hoyle, Lindsay				X	
Jones, Jon Owen		X		X	
MacDonald, Calum			X		X
McDonnell, John					X
Mackinlay, Andrew			X		X
Mitchell, Austin			X	X	X
Osborne, Sandra				X	
Simpson, Alan		X		X	X
Skinner, Dennis					X
Smith, Geraldine	X	X	X	X	X
Smith, Llew					X
Taylor, David	X		X		X
Wareing, Robert				X	X
Williams, Alan			X		X
Williams, Betty		X		X	
Wright, Anthony D				X	

The Government might have faced an even more substantial rebellion on Report had the Speaker not prevented Alan Simpson's amendment No. 1 from being put to a vote. Simpson's amendment had proposed that category 'A' gaming machines would be allowed, but the upper prize limit would be the same as for category B – £2,000. The Speaker ruled that the amendment had not been moved formally, and was not the lead amendment, but rather down the queue with a group of other amendments and new clauses, and therefore could not be put to a separate vote. Other Labour backbench amendments that failed to be put to a vote due to the guillotine and the grouping of amendments included one in the name of Win Griffiths and Frank Field that would have deleted regional

casinos from the Bill altogether, and another in the name of John Grogan which called for an early review of the impact of the new regional casinos.

The five rebellions on the Report stage of the Gambling Bill brought the total number of rebellions in this session of the Parliament to 18, averaging twelve Labour MPs per rebellion.