

## **An Absent Enemy: George Galloway's voting, 2001-2005**

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Even before his suspension, and subsequent expulsion, from the Labour Party, George Galloway was hardly a backbench loyalist. Prior to the loss of the party whip, he had voted against the Government on 27 occasions since 2001 (22 in the first session, and five in the period in the second leading up to his suspension). Most of these rebellions were over three issues: the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill brought in following 9/11, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, and Iraq. But he also rebelled as one of just 11 Labour MPs to rebel over the bombing of Afghanistan (Div. 48, 2001-02), and he also took part in a rebellion over the Enterprise Bill (Div. 273, 2001-02).

On 6 May 2003, George Galloway was suspended by the Labour party pending an internal inquiry into whether he had brought the Party into disrepute by urging British troops not to fight in an illegal war against Saddam Hussein. He was subsequently expelled from the Labour party on 23 October 2003, and chose not to vote in the House of Commons during the whole period between his suspension and his expulsion.

Having been suspended, Galloway disappeared from the voting lobbies for 206 straight divisions, re-emerging on 19 November 2003 to vote against the Government on foundation hospitals during the Lords amendment stage of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Bill (Div. 381), his only vote for the remainder of the second session.

In the third session, Galloway did not vote on 335 occasions out of a possible 340 votes, but on each of the five occasions that he did vote, he voted against the Government in the division lobbies. These votes are listed below:

- Div. 38, 27 January 2004: Against Second Reading of the Higher Education Bill.
- Div. 65, 1 March 2004: In favour of an amendment in the name of Neil Gerrard concerning the children of destitute asylum seekers, during the Report stage of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Bill.
- Div. 67, 1 March 2004: Against Third Reading of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Bill.
- Div. 123, 31 March 2004: Leave out clauses 22 to 27 (top-up fees), Report stage of the Higher Education Bill.
- Div. 318, 11 November 2004: Against a Government amendment to a Conservative Opposition Day motion on family doctor services.

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In the fourth session, Galloway's voting record increased slightly, as he cast 13 votes (out of a possible 155, or 8%), 12 of which were cast against the Government:

Div. 11, 14 December 2004: supported an amendment to the Report stage of the Mental Capacity Bill in the name of former Tory leader, Iain Duncan Smith that would have prevented doctors from taking any action that would hasten the end to a patient's life.

Div. 12, 14 December 2004: supported an amendment to the Report stage of the Mental Capacity Bill in the name of Ann Widdecombe that would have insisted that nothing in the Act would authorise the withdrawal of palliative care.

Div. 14, 14 December 2004: supported another amendment in the name of IDS to the Report stage of the Mental Capacity Bill which would have insisted that a person's life and health be basic to their 'personal welfare' when determining what was in their best interests.

Div.16, 14 December 2004: supported an amendment to the Report stage of the Mental Capacity Bill in the name of the Conservative, Dominic Grieve that would have stopped medical research if it was not in the best interests of the patient, or not in their direct benefit.

Div. 17, 14 December 2004: opposed the Third Reading of the Mental Capacity Bill.

Div. 23, 20 December 2004: supported a Conservative Opposition Reasoned amendment to the Second Reading of the Identity Cards Bill.

Div. 24, 20 December 2004: opposed the Second Reading of the Identity Cards Bill.

Div. 85, 20 December 2004: opposed the Third Reading of the Identity Cards Bill.

Div. 93, 23 February 2005: supported a joint Conservative/Liberal Democrat reasoned amendment to the Second Reading of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill.

Div. 94, 23 February 2005: opposed the Third Reading of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill.

Div. 141, 10 March 2005: supported the Lords in their insistence to the Prevention of Terrorism Bill that 'reasonable suspicion' be required rather than 'balance of probabilities' as the standard of proof before non-derogatory control orders could be applied.

Div.42, 10 March 2005: rejected the Government's compromise over a sunset clause to the Prevention of Terrorism Bill.

The other occasion in the fourth session when Galloway voted, came on a free vote, over the return to the pre-reform Commons sitting hours on a Tuesday (. Div. 47, 26 January 2005). He voted with the majority of Conservatives and LibDem MPs, against the majority of Labour MPs (albeit a very narrow majority: 164 voting with Galloway, 165 against) and in favour of a return to the old sitting hours.

### **Summary**

Since his suspension from the Labour party in May 2003 (and subsequent expulsion in October 2003), George Galloway only voted in 19 out of a possible 710 divisions, an overall turnout rate of 2.7 per cent. But when he did vote, he voted against the government: on 18 out of 19 of those occasions, Galloway voted against the Government, selecting high profile issues to register his opposition, such as foundation hospitals, top-up fees, the Government's asylum and immigration policy, plans to introduce identity cards, as well as aspects of the Government's proposals on living wills.