

Terrorism Bill Second Reading Splits All Three Main Parties

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All three main parliamentary parties split over the Second Reading of the Terrorism Bill on 26 October.

Superficially, the Government gained a massive majority for its Second Reading, winning the vote by 472 votes to 94, with the help of Conservative and DUP support.

Some 165 Conservatives joined 299 Labour MPs (and 8 Democratic Unionists) in the aye lobby. The no lobby was dominated by 61 Liberal Democrats, who elected to vote against Second Reading, with only one of their number – Mike Hancock – choosing to support the Government.

Sixteen Labour MPs defied a three-line whip by joining the Lib Dems in the no lobby, including one of the new 2005 intake, Linda Riordan, the MP for Halifax. Several other Labour MPs abstained, including Mark Fisher, Neil Gerrard and Austin Mitchell. Immediately after the Second Reading vote, Lynne Jones, who had also abstained on Second Reading, was the only Labour MP to oppose the Bill's programme motion.

The Conservatives also experienced a modest backbench rebellion, with eight MPs joining the no lobby, including the former Tory leadership contender, Kenneth Clarke, as well as John Bercow, one of his most high-profile supporters. Meanwhile, Boris Johnson, another Clarke backer, cast a deliberate abstention by voting in both lobbies. The husband-and-wife pairing, Nicholas and Ann Winterton also abstained on Second Reading.

Amongst the minor parties, four SNP and three Plaid Cymru MPs opposed the Government, voting alongside Syvilia Hermon, the UUP's only MP and two other independents, Dr Richard Taylor and Peter Law. Including his vote against the subsequent programme motion, Law has now voted against the Government on eight occasions since his victory in Blaenau Gwent at the General Election.

Last night's two rebellions on the Labour side brings the total number of rebellions so far this Parliament to 17, averaging 10 MPs per rebellion. Some 40 MPs have now taken part in these revolts, and almost one quarter of all divisions have seen a Labour rebellion of some sort since the Election. This is a higher rate of rebellion than in the last Parliament, which itself saw the highest rate of rebellion in the post-war era.

The real dangers for the Government over the Terrorism Bill will come at Committee and Report stage when they will not be able to count on Conservative support over such controversial issues as the 90-day detention of terror suspects and the vexed question of how to define the glorification of terrorism.

* 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.

Backbench rebels at the Second Reading of the Terrorism Bill

Liberal Democrat to vote for the Government:
Hancock, Mike

Conservatives who voted against the Government:
Bercow, John
Bottomley, Peter
Clarke, Kenneth
Gummer, John
Hogg, Douglas
Shepherd Richard
Walter, Robert
Wilson, Rob

Labour MPs who voted against the Government:
Abbott, Diane
Clapham, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Gibson, Ian
Hamilton, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Jackson, Glenda
Marshall-Andrews, Bob
McDonnell, John
Riordan, Linda
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert
Wood, Mike

Labour MP to vote against the programme motion
Jones, Lynne