

Government Not Defeated on Opposition Day Motion Shocker

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Tuesday 31 October 2006 saw the 14th and 15th Labour backbench rebellions over the issue of Iraq – and the first since the election of May 2005. Despite some discussion of a possible threat to the Government’s majority, the eventual rebellion saw twelve Labour MPs support a Plaid Cymru/SNP Opposition Day motion calling for a Commons inquiry into the war in Iraq. This makes it the largest Opposition Day rebellion since Labour came to power in 1997 – but only just, a mere one MP larger than the 11 Labour MPs who rebelled in June 2003 to support a Lib Dem opposition day motion on Iraq. (The vote also saw David Taylor cast one of his now frequent double-vote abstentions). The rebellion caused the Government’s majority to fall to 25. In a second division held immediately afterwards, eight of the twelve rebels also opposed a Government amendment declining to hold an inquiry. The other four rebels from the first vote did not participate in the second division, strongly suggesting that they abstained. The table below lists the MPs who voted against their whip:

Labour backbench rebels, Iraq Opposition Day, 31 October 2006

Name of MP	SNP/Plaid motion	Govt. amdt
Cohen, Harry	X	X
Corbyn, Jeremy	X	X
Fisher, Mark	X	a
Godsiff, Roger	X	X
Jackson, Glenda	X	X
McDonnell, John	X	X
Marshall-Andrews, Bob	X	a
Simpson, Alan	X	a
Soulsby, Sir Peter	X	a
Strang, Dr Gavin	X	X
Taylor, David	A	a
Wareing, Robert	X	X
Wood, Mike	X	X

Note: X indicates a vote against the government; A indicates a double-vote abstention; a indicates an almost certain abstention.

Of last night’s twelve Labour rebels, eight had rebelled on previous Opposition Day debates on Iraq, and all except Roger Godsiff had signed one of three Early Day motions either calling for an enquiry into the war and/or a debate in Parliament on the issue. Eight out of the twelve rebels are drawn from the ten most rebellious Labour MPs still in the parliamentary Labour party.

Even allowing for the rebels, the two main parties were unable to muster all their available MPs. The final tally of 273 ayes against 298 noes suggests that many

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MPs from both of the main parties either abstained or stayed away. On the first vote, the twelve Labour rebels were joined by 182 Conservatives, 59 Liberal Democrats, 6 DUP MPs, 6 SNP, 3 SDLP, 2 Plaid Cymru, plus George Galloway, Dai Davies, Clare Short and Dr Richard Taylor – along with David Taylor. The no lobby comprised 298 Labour MPs, only one Opposition MP, Sylvia Hermon of the UUP – along with David Taylor.

The Government won the subsequent vote on its own amendment by 294 votes to 264, a majority of thirty. The aye lobby comprised 295 Labour MPs plus Sylvia Hermon of the UUP, while the no lobby was made up of 181 Conservatives, 60 Liberal Democrats, 8 Labour rebels, 6 DUP, 6 SNP, 2 Plaid Cymru, George Galloway, Dai Davies and Dr Richard Taylor. Newly independent MP Clare Short seems to have abstained on the second vote, whilst the Lib Dem Dr Evan Harris did not participate in the first vote, but voted against the Government amendment.