

What's changed since 1993? Support for referenda on Maastricht and Lisbon

PHILIP COWLEY and MARK STUART*

Most of the parliamentary discussion of the Lisbon Treaty has been pretty dull so far. All the predictions that this would be Labour's Maastricht now look pretty silly. The largest backbench revolt on the Government side has involved 18 Labour MPs – the rest have all been in single figures.

Of more interest is the forthcoming vote on whether there should be a referendum. Most focus will be on whether the Government will win (answer: yes), whether they would still have won had the Lib Dems voted for a referendum instead of officially abstaining (answer: probably yes, although it might be a close run thing), along with discussion of the size of any splits within the various parliamentary parties (we expect to see proportionally larger splits within the Lib Dems than within Labour, which in turn will be larger than among the Conservatives).

There is, however, one other interesting angle to take, which is to compare the stances taken by particular individuals in 1993 with those they will take in 2008.

There was a similar call for a referendum in 1993; then as now, it was rejected. The key vote was division number 248, on 21 April 1993. The Labour backbencher (and former leadership candidate), Bryan Gould, moved a referendum clause, which fell by 363 votes to 124. The heavy defeat was the result of both Labour and Conservative frontbenches opposing Gould's clause. Yet backing the call for a referendum were 38 Conservative MPs along with 65 Labour MPs, plus 14 Lib Dems, three from the SNP and six Ulster Unionists.

The turnover of MPs over the last fifteen year – largely, though not solely, the result of the landslide of 1997 – has been considerable and means that a majority of the MPs present then are not still in the House today. However, plenty are, and for some this week's vote will provide an interesting contrast with their behaviour then.

For Labour's frontbench, there is at least the benefit of consistency: they were against a referendum then as now. But there are those Labour MPs who defied their frontbench to vote for a referendum over Maastricht who might find themselves opposing one over Lisbon. The following Labour MPs voted for a referendum in 1993 and remain in the House:

* University of Nottingham. Further details are available from www.revolt.co.uk.

Diane Abbott
Harry Cohen
Michael Connarty
Jeremy Corbyn
Ian Davidson
Brian Donohoe
Gwyneth Dunwoody
Frank Field

Mike Hall
Jimmy Hood
George Howarth
Lynne Jones
Jane Kennedy
Austin Mitchell (teller)
Chris Mullin
Gordon Prentice

Terry Rooney
Alan Simpson
Dennis Skinner
Alan Williams
David Winnick
Dr Tony Wright

We make that 22, plus George Galloway and Bob Wareing, both of whom backed a referendum when they were Labour MPs, but who are now not in the Labour fold. We suspect many, though not all, of these 22 will vote for a referendum this time too. Those that don't, however, will need to answer the question: why was it OK then but not now?

Perhaps even more intriguing, though, are the changes on the Conservative side. Because the Conservative frontbench on the issue has changed since 1993, there are a much larger number of Conservative MPs still in the House for whom a referendum on Lisbon could involve voting against the stance they took in fifteen years ago. The following Conservative MPs voted against a referendum in 1993 and are still in the House today:

Peter Ainsworth
David Amess
Michael Ancram
James Arbuthnot
Peter Atkinson
Tony Baldry
Henry Bellingham
Sir Paul Beresford
Tim Boswell
Peter Bottomley
Julian Brazier
Angela Browning
Simon Burns
Alistair Burt
Sir John Butterfill
James Clappison
Kenneth Clarke
Geoffrey Clifton-
Brown
Sir Patrick Cormack
David Curry
David Davis
Stephen Dorrell
Alan Duncan
Nigel Evans

David Evennett
Michael Fabricant
Liam Fox
Roger Gale
Edward Garnier
Cheryl Gillan
John Greenway
John Gummer
William Hague
Oliver Heald
David Heathcoat-
Amory
Charles Hendry
Douglas Hogg
John Horam
Michael Howard
Michael Jack
Robert Key
Greg Knight
Jacqui Lait
Edward Leigh
David Liddington
Peter Lilley
Peter Luff
Andrew MacKay

David Maclean
Patrick McLoughlin
Michael Mates
Andrew Mitchell
Malcolm Moss
Richard Ottaway
Jim Paice
Eric Pickles
John Redwood
Andrew Robathan
Nicholas Soames
Bob Spink
Richard Spring
Sir John Stanley
Anthony Steen
Gary Streeter
Ian Taylor
David Tredinnick
Peter Viggers
Nigel Waterson
Ann Widdecombe
David Willetts
Tim Yeo
Sir George Young

We make that 72, plus Derek Conway, now no longer with the whip, and Alan Haselhurst, who then voted against a referendum but as Deputy Speaker is now prohibited from voting. There is also Quentin Davies, who voted against then, and will presumably do the same now – just in a different party.

Whereas Labour's list comprises mainly backbenchers, there are some more interesting names in the Conservative list, including David Davies, William Hague,

John Redwood, and Patrick McLoughlin. We suspect only a handful of those on this Conservative list, at best, will defy the whip to vote against a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. The rest will need to answer the question: why was it not appropriate in 1993 but it is now?

Of course, in all these cases it is possible to come up with a series of explanations – ranging from the collective (the changed status of the European union and public debate on it) to the individual ('I was in the government then, but am free to speak my mind now...'). Alternatively, some might just say that they have changed their minds. People sometimes do.