

Where did they go? The voting of those who signed the Alternative White Paper

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In the run-up to the publication of the Education and Inspections Bill, backbench opposition centred around the Alternative White Paper (AWP), an attempt to rally Labour doubters around a reformist document (rather than simply being oppositional) and to engage in negotiation with the Government over the content of the Bill. A total of 91 Labour MPs signed the AWP. The purpose of this short briefing paper is to examine what those MPs did in the Second Reading rebellion on the 15 March.

The rebels

The signatories to the AWP did not amount to a full, definitive list of Labour backbenchers opposed to the Bill. Several more MPs had signed Ian Gibson's EDM 898, which expressed 'grave reservations' about the White Paper, but did not put their names to the AWP. In particular, two MPs who did so – Michael Connarty and Jim Dobbin – voted against the Bill's Second Reading. And a further six MPs did not sign either the Alternative White Paper or put their names to Gibson's EDM, and yet they also voted against the Bill at Second Reading.¹ But still, the majority of those who voted against the Bill's Second Reading were also signatories to the AWP.

Of the 91 signatories, just under half (44, or 48 per cent) went on to vote against the Education and Inspections Bill at Second Reading. Some 34 MPs (37 per cent) voted for the Government. Five definitely abstained (being absent from that vote, but participating in the subsequent programme motion vote), while a further eight did not vote in either the Second Reading vote or the subsequent programme motion. These eight may have been authorised or unauthorised absences.

The MPs are listed in the table at the end of this paper (a table that works distinctly better in colour than in black and white). The table ranks MPs according to the number of rebellious votes that they have cast since 2001. The difference in behaviour between those who have rebelled frequently and those who have rebelled less often is stark. As Table 1 shows, of the most rebellious 30 MPs who signed the AWP, 28 (93%) went on to rebel, either by abstaining or by voting against (and with not a single one voting for the government). Of the next 31 MPs, 15 (48%) rebelled, and of the least rebellious 30 just six (20%) broke ranks. In other words, the most rebellious 30 MPs were more than four times more likely to rebel against the party line than the least rebellious 30.

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¹ Ian Davidson, Doug Henderson, Peter Kilfoyle, George Mudie, Geraldine Smith and Paul Truswell.

1. Behaviour of AWP signatories at Second Reading of Education and Inspections Bill

	For Second Reading	Abstain	Absent	Against Second Reading	Total number of rebels (inc. abstainers)		N
	N	N	N	N	N	%	
Most rebellious	0	3	2	25	28	93	30
Middle-ranking	12	2	4	13	15	48	31
Least rebellious	22	0	2	6	6	20	30
Total	34	5	8	44			

As a result, if we look at the initial 57 signatories to the AWP – those who had signed up by 14 December 2005, and who deliberately went out of their way to insist that they were not ‘usual suspects’, a slightly different picture emerges. The Government did noticeably better at converting this group than the 91 signatories as a whole. Twenty-six of the 34 MPs who signed the Alternative White Paper, but who eventually voted for the Government came from the initial wave of 57 MPs, as well as seven out of the eight MPs who eventually did not vote, and three out of the five MPs who abstained.

Despite the scale of the rebellion at Second Reading – the third largest second reading rebellion since Labour came into office in 1997 - both the rate of attrition between the AWP being published and the vote itself, as well as the smaller rebellion over the Bill’s programme motion, indicate the extent to which the Government is still able to persuade disgruntled MPs to vote with it, as long as it is prepared to make concessions – in this case, quite substantial concession – in the face of backbench criticism.

The AWP signatories, by previous dissenting votes

<i>Name of MP</i>	<i>Total number of dissenting votes, 2001-2006</i>	<i>Vote on Second Reading</i>
Corbyn, Jeremy	177	Against
McDonnell, John	167	Against
Jones, Lynne	128	Against
Marshall-Andrews, Bob	127	Abstained
Wareing, Bob	118	Against
Simpson, Alan	117	Against
Hopkins, Kelvin	105	Against
Fisher, Mark	93	Abstained
Skinner, Dennis	84	Against
Jackson, Glenda	83	Against
Abbott, Diane	79	Against
Gerrard, Neil	68	Against
Short, Clare	58	Against
Wood, Mike	53	Against
Gibson, Ian	52	Against
Dunwoody, Gwyneth	51	Against
Taylor, David	51	Against
Prentice, Gordon	41	Against
Flynn, Paul	37	Against
Drew, David	34	Against
Dobson, Frank	31	Against
Clapham, Michael	30	Against
Cohen, Harry	30	Against
Austin, John,	29	Not present
Campbell, Ronnie	25	Against
Grogan, John	23	Against
Caton, Martin	22	Against
Cryer, Ann	21	Abstained
Trickett, Jon	20	Against
Vis, Rudi	20	Not present
Berry, Roger	19	For
Etherington, Bill	18	Not present
McCafferty, Chris	18	Not present
Mitchell, Austin	17	Against
Morgan, Julie	17	Not present
Lloyd, Tony	16	Against
Turner, Des	15	Against
Burden, Richard	14	For
Clark, Katy*	14	Against
Williams, Betty	14	Not present
Riordan, Linda*	13	Against
Iddon, Brian	12	For
Owen, Albert	12	Abstained
Efford, Clive	11	Against

Illsley, Eric	10	Abstained
Challen, Colin,	9	For
Havard, Dai	9	Against
Walley, Joan	9	Against
Allen, Graham	8	For
Chaytor, David	8	For
Mullin, Chris	8	For
Naysmith, Doug	8	For
Prosser, Gwyn	8	For
Burgon, Colin	7	Against
Ellman, Louise	6	For
Heyes, David	6	Against
Meacher, Michael	6	Against
Purchase, Ken	6	Against
Jones, Helen	5	Against
Love, Andy	5	For
Murphy, Denis	5	For
Robinson, Geoffrey	5	For
Ruddock, Joan	5	For
Smith, John	5	Against
Dean, Janet	4	For
Hamilton, Fabian	4	Against
Jones, Martyn	4	For
Lepper, David	4	For
O'Hara, Eddie	4	For
Francis, Hywel	3	For
Humble, Joan	3	Against
Jones, Kevan	3	For
Keen, Alan	3	Against
Salter, Martin	3	For
Wyatt, Derek	3	For
Cruddas, Jon	2	Against
Denham, John	2	For
Eagle, Angela	2	For
Osborne, Sandra	2	For
Raynsford, Nick	2	For
Soulsby, Peter*	2	Not present
Betts, Clive	1	Not present
Clelland, David	1	Against
Mallaber, Judy	1	For
Whitehead, Alan	1	For
Anderson, Dave*	0	For
Foster, Michael J	0	For
Gilroy, Linda	0	For
Griffith, Nia*	0	For
Seabeck, Alison*	0	For
Todd, Mark	0	For

Note: MPs marked with an asterisk are new MPs, elected in 2005. In some cases, as with Katy Clark and Linda Riordan, they are probably lower down the league table than their recent record of rebellion would indicate.