

Britain: 'Humiliating victory' in war on civil liberties

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On June 11, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's proposals to extend the time that police are allowed to detain "terrorist suspects" without charge narrowly scraped through a vote in the House of Commons. The MP vote was 315 to 306 to back Brown's proposal to extend the limit on detention without charge from 28 to 42 days.

Despite severe pressure from the Labour whips, 36 Labour MPs rebelled and voted against the government. Brown won by a narrow margin only because nine MPs from the Northern Ireland Democratic Unionist Party decided at the last minute to vote with the government.

The June 12 Morning Star commented that there were "reports of a 'bribe' that would see up to £200 million pumped into the finances of the Northern Ireland Executive", and the June 13 New Worker reported claims "that the government offered a change of policy on trade with Cuba and full compensation to former miners suffering work-related illnesses in an effort to seduce left Labour MPs".

In the lead up to the vote, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith had attempted to quell the backbench rebellion by strengthening "safeguards" against the misuse of the proposed legislation, but rebel Labour MP Bob Marshall-Andrews told the June 11 Independent that "even the so-called safeguards rely upon trust. Parliament is to be given a power to review the 42-day extension period in individual cases. This quasi-judicial role is totally unworkable. Parliament has neither the capacity nor the constitution to investigate individual cases."

The Social Democratic and Labour Party MP Mike Durkan told the June 12 BBC News: "Gordon Brown offered the SDLP a deal on Sunday but we told them we were not prepared to deal in civil liberties." Durkan commented that although Brown had avoided a "humiliating defeat", the result of the vote had been a "humiliating victory".

P.S.

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