



## TERROR DEBATE

*Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South) (Lab):* I, too, doubt whether there will be a Division on the order. However, if there were, I would find it difficult to vote for it. That is not to offer endorsement of or support for any one of or all the organisations on the list. I believe that fundamentalist organisations are, by their nature, barking mad and would be thrown out of any sensible society. That is my approach to fundamentalism.

I am, however, worried about three matters: our responsibilities in the democratic process; the nature of the threat; and the consequences of simply adding names to a proscribed list without due processes of proper parliamentary scrutiny. In considering the organisations that are listed, one of my starting points was to ask what we knew about the involvement of any of them in the current risk or threat to the United Kingdom. So far, 895 people have been arrested and detained under the Terrorism Act 2000, of whom 55 per cent. were released without charge, 15 per cent.—138 people—were charged and 2.5 per cent., which makes a grand total of 23, were convicted of offences.

I have not been able to find out from the Library or the Home Office whether any of the organisations on the list have been involved or implicated in any of the charges, detentions or convictions under the Act so far. When we put names on a list of proscribed organisations, it seems reasonable to ask what evidence we have of the involvement of any of them in current actions that have threatened the security of the United Kingdom. To be unable to get an answer to that is deeply worrying in the democratic process. How can we as a Parliament draw up a list of organisations that we propose to proscribe when we cannot even tell Members of Parliament whether we have any evidence to show that those whom we have arrested under our anti-terrorism legislation have any connections with them? It would be helpful simply to know the answer to that.

*Simon Hughes :* The hon. Gentleman will anticipate that I support his view of the process; it is entirely compatible with the position that my colleagues and I have always taken. Does he agree that we could do better if, before the House was asked to debate and vote on such an order, we asked the Intelligence and Security Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Home Affairs Committee to do some work for us to prepare the ground? It would be better, even if we had only one debate, because we could vote on each organisation separately on the basis of some consideration by colleagues with the time to do it before the Government brought their proposal to the House.

*Alan Simpson:* That was precisely the point that I was about to make. When we debated the initial proscribed list, many of us made the same points. We said that Parliament had been presented with a complete list and that we were unable to consider individual organisations on the list and vote on them separately. We were told that there was provision for appeals, but that is not the same as a parliamentary right to exercise a parliamentary judgment on the legitimacy of a case for inclusion.

It is dangerous for the democratic process if we start on a path of assuming that Parliament has

a right to make lumped-together decisions on composite lists without adequate scrutiny. I would be happy if the list had gone through a separate Committee scrutiny system in the House. I would be happy if there had been a fuller debate in which we were allowed to exercise our judgment organisation by organisation. I might not have liked the decisions that were reached, but at least I could have been confident that our responsibilities for the democratic process had been properly exercised. However, the House is not going about matters in that way and that takes us into dangerous waters, as illustrated by the case that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) mentioned.

I am worried by the point that the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) made about organisations on other people's lists. The House has a right to be told what representations other Governments have made to the UK Government about including organisations on a proscribed list. I suspect that if we looked at the United Nations list, it would contain some organisations whose proscription would be unwelcome to the United States of America. I suspect that we do not include any of those organisations on our list. We have a proscription list that is friendly for the current US Administration. There is a dreadful lopsidedness to that sort of approach.

If we go through the list, we see that many of the organisations go back to the 1980s. We were not presented with them in the first or the second proscribed list and we must ask what has changed to require their addition to our list of known risks or threats to the UK. The list is littered with expressions such as "have the potential to", "have the capacity to", "they have anti-western views" or "they have anti-American views". Many of us have similar inclinations, but that does not make us terrorist organisations. I was relieved to note that the Socialist Campaign group was not on the list. [Hon. Members: "Not yet."] Indeed. I would not rule it out for all time.

John McDonnell: As the chair of the Socialist Campaign Group, I should like to say that, so far, there has been no indication of that happening, thank God. Is there not a sweet sense of irony, however, that the first group on the list is the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which has been seeking the replacement of the current Libyan regime? The CIA has been trying to achieve that for nearly 25 years.

Alan Simpson: I am well aware of that. We might also look at Harakat-ul-Jihad-ul-Islami, an organisation originally formed to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. I suspect that, at that time, no one would have described it as a terrorist organisation. It was almost certainly founded with the covert backing of the CIA, and would have received direct funding from the CIA for its heroic acts of resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. However, now that circumstances have changed and that group's hostilities are directed towards those whom it regards as the current occupiers of that country, it has become a terrorist organisation. Parliament must exercise greater judgment and scrutiny of the legitimacy of current threats and the impartiality of the lobbying that we receive from other Governments to add organisations to our list.

Two of the criteria for inclusion on the list apply to organisations whose principal aim is to overthrow legitimate Governments and to those that advocate armed struggle or the killing of the leaders of such Governments or of the Administrations that run their country. Bearing in

mind those criteria, I would urge people to look at the website of the Christian Coalition of America, which is run by Rev. Pat Buchanan, who actively and openly advocates the assassination of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. If we are to be consistent, we should consider imposing a proscribing order on the Christian Coalition, too. Those who actively advocate the assassination of democratically elected leaders of Governments, and whose organisations platform such ideas openly on their websites, ought to be included in the banning order. The thing is, they are not Muslims. We take a very different view of Christian fundamentalists, including those who advocate armed insurgency and the killing of nationally elected leaders, because they are somehow part of civilisation. I worry when, at each stage of a banning process, we are faced with a list of organisations whose crime has been to shift allegiance from pro-western terrorism to anti-western terrorism, and which excludes organisations that advocate precisely the same acts of terrorism against regimes that the west does not like.

*Mike Gapes (Ilford, South) (Lab/Co-op):* My hon. Friend is in danger of undermining the validity of his case. I should like to cite an example from the list: Harakat-ul-Jihad-ul-Islami (Bangladesh). According to the list, that organisation

"targets progressive intellectuals and secular politicians who ideologically challenge the path of the radical Islamists. It also criticises NGO activity as un-Islamic because these organisations are involved in spreading Western ideas of women's empowerment and social transformation."

My hon. Friend is trying to create a caricature. I would argue, however, that since 9/11 and the attacks in July this year, we face a new situation. There are international links between many of these organisations, and by trivialising the issue he is not taking it seriously.

*Alan Simpson:* I reject that. I return to the basis of my argument, which is that the House is trivialising the process because we are not being allowed to vote on each of these organisations one by one. I have no hesitation in saying that there are organisations on the list that I would vote to ban. However, there are others about which I would want to defer my decision and to ask questions. The refusal to give Parliament the right to make selective judgments, organisation by organisation, case by case, allows us to do nothing other than make a blanket judgment on a list that cannot be amended.

*Mr. Grieve :* I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is trivialising the matter at all. Indeed, the points that he makes are perfectly legitimate. Perhaps we are being too selective in the organisations that we are banning. The need for extra parliamentary scrutiny—a difficult matter, given that so much of this information comes from the intelligence services—is desirable. Otherwise, we shall not be able to persuade people of the need to take these steps. That is a very serious democratic deficit.

*Alan Simpson:* That is pretty much the point on which I want to end. I do not want to focus on the case for or against proscribing specific organisations on this list. I want us to look at our responsibilities as a Parliament. How can we exercise our duty of scrutiny? Our duty is to exercise specific judgments case by case, to see whether we ought, quite properly, to include organisations on a list such as this.

*Simon Hughes:* I share the hon. Gentleman's views on this issue, and I also happen to be a member of the Christian Church. I believe that we do inter-faith and inter-community relations a disservice if we take a differential view. That is why, when we debate the Equality Bill, which will come before us soon, we must remember that protecting one faith in this country while not giving protection to the others represents a fundamental flaw in the equality with which we should treat all these issues in Parliament.

*Alan Simpson:* I want to finish on this point. We have a duty to ourselves to insist that the way in which we approach the scrutiny of organisations to be included on proscribed lists has to be more selective. I appreciate the difficulties involved in subjecting some of the claims to proper scrutiny, but it cannot be beyond the wit and wisdom of Parliament to set up mechanisms for due diligence questioning. We do not have any such mechanisms as we try to deal with this list today. Doubts will remain as long as we continue to produce these lumped-together lists that we cannot revisit. They cast a shadow of doubt over the fairness, the even-handedness and the wisdom with which Parliament deals with this process.

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