

Brown leads backlash to Lords reform plan

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Labour is rethinking its plans for House of Lords reform after a last-minute backlash against what was thought to be its preferred solution.

Gordon Brown is one of the key Cabinet ministers arguing strongly against the plan, which would involve up to 80 per cent of the Lords being chosen by a form of indirect election. Lord Falconer, the Constitutional Affairs Secretary, and Peter Hain, the leader of the Commons, have been pushing the idea originally championed by the singer Billy Bragg.

At the time of the Labour Party conference, ministers claimed there was growing support within government for the plan. It was presented as a compromise acceptable to those who wanted the Lords to be elected and those concerned that a democratic Lords would challenge the authority of the Commons.

Lord Falconer told the conference that, if they won the election, the Lords would be reformed "once and for all" early in Labour's third term. But, according to Labour sources, Cabinet ministers are having second thoughts about the Bragg proposal.

Known as the "secondary mandate", Bragg's idea would involve seats in the Lords being distributed in direct proportion to the votes cast at the general election. People would still vote only once, for an MP. But the results would also be used to decide the composition of the Lords, with new peers being chosen from party lists on a proportionate basis.

Mr Brown has criticised the scheme on the grounds that it involves a single vote being cast for two purposes. He is also said to be worried that it could damage Labour's electoral prospects.

Labour did well in the last two elections because people were prepared to vote tactically against the Tories. But voters might be less likely to do that if voting for a minor party in a general election might help that party win seats in the Lords.

Mr Brown's colleagues believe that he has a particular right to intervene because, if he succeeds Tony Blair as Prime Minister, he will be faced with having to deal with the new Upper Chamber created by Labour.

Bragg said he believed his "secondary mandate" still had a chance of being adopted. "I cannot believe Labour is going to go into the next election saying nothing about the Lords," he said.

► [1 October 2004: 'Once and for all' reform of Lords will follow election win, vows Falconer](#)

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