

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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7th Oct 2004

Official Launch of Yes4theNorthEast Campaign



At the launch with Brendan Foster and Newcastle's Tony Flynn

The Electoral Commission have designated YES4NE the official body to head the campaign for a Yes vote in the Regional Government referendum. This means they will receive government funding to run the campaign and do their best to maximise turnout for a positive vote. The launch was attended by the Chair of the Party Ian McCartney MP and was addressed by, among others, Brendan Foster. I also met with North East Regional Assembly Chairman, Cllr Bob Gibson, to talk over the

content and implications of the government's Draft Regional Assemblies Bill.



With Cllr Gibson of NERA

Arts and Culture Conference!



With (L to R) Cllr John McElroy and IFCCA Chair Risto Ruuhonen

I was delighted to be invited by the Arts Council England to be present for the announcement that Gateshead is to be the host for the 2006 World Summit on Arts and Culture. This is the third Summit - previous cities have been Ottawa and Singapore - and will bring together key people in cultural policy and regional development to discuss the impact of various government and non-government bodies on cultural regeneration. Gateshead beat off rival bids to host the summit because the visiting team from the International Federation of Arts Councils

were so impressed by Sage Gateshead and Baltic, and the way in which cultural and economic regeneration has occurred here on Tyneside.

Minister visits Tyne Bridge

Local Government and Regional affairs minister Nick Raynsford MP was back on Tyneside recently. This time to look at projects within the Housing Pathfinder area.

He was particularly interested in the new housing estate on the former Gateshead Garden Festival site designed by 'Red or Dead's' Wayne Hemmingsway.

The estate introduces new living concepts based on care for the environment, recycling, traffic restrictions and consideration for neighbours. There are restrictions on the number of cars per household allowed on the estate and well planned communal areas.

St Mary's Grant Boost



Above with Gateshead Cabinet member Cllr Linda Green and Heritage Lottery North East manager Keith Batlett

The Heritage Lottery Fund has done it again for Gateshead. Following funding for the refurbishment of Saltwell Park and the restoration of St Cuthbert's Church in Bensham, a further grant has been made to contribute towards the conversion of St Mary's Church—Gateshead's oldest building—into a Heritage and Visitor Centre for all ages. This is a perfect example of using heritage as a springboard for the future. It will link the best of Gateshead's heritage with the exciting new developments that will become the heritage of our children.



Children from Rose Street Primary join (l-r) developer's rep, Wayne Hemmingsway, Nick Raynsford and myself



Parliament

September used to be a quiet month. The two week return to the house this year however turned out to be quite eventful. The government decided to table the **'Fox Hunting' Bill** and arrange for it to go through all stages of the Commons in one day. This led to the scenes we saw outside the House of Commons on Wednesday 13th September and the extraordinary scenes of demonstrators actually gaining access to the floor of the chamber during the debate. Coming only days after the 'Batman' incident at Buckingham Palace this was not a good week for the security services. I am convinced, as are many others, that the Commons intrusion was well planned and had inside assistance. *It is interesting to note the kind of demonstration we saw outside Parliament on this, and other occasions over the last seven years, could not have happened under the Tory Government. Why? Because demonstrations within the vicinity of Parliament and Whitehall were outlawed by the Thatcher government.*

I voted for an outright ban and in the event the bill was carried by a large majority on a free vote. It now remains to be seen what the Lords do with it, but there is a determination to see that the will of the elected Commons prevails this time.

The two-week return also gave my Select Committee an opportunity to conduct an enquiry into the **Draft Regional Government Bill** and a good 10 – 12 hours were taken up in interviewing witnesses in four sessions. In reply to a question from me, minister Nick Raynsford said that the referendums in the North West and Yorkshire/Humberside will still go ahead, at some stage and regardless of the outcome here in

the North East on 4th November. This should serve as a stark reminder that should we fail to secure a 'yes' vote in the North East, and one or both of these regions subsequently do vote yes, then our region will not only have lost the opportunity to steal a march and lead the way but will be placed at a significant disadvantage to add to our problems of peripherality and economic under-performance.

Comment

The official 'YES' and 'NO' campaigns for the Regional Government referendum have now been designated and I have attended a number of events and meetings in connection with this. While we remain confident in our case, and optimistic that we can secure a YES vote in the North East, we cannot be complacent and our best efforts could easily be upset by issues beyond our control. For instance; in a further demonstration of our government's determination to be more democratic and open than the Tories ever were, a **Freedom of Information Act** was brought in some time ago. This means that, among other things, MP's expenses and office running costs will be published. I have no problem with that, but the press and media will undoubtedly distort and misuse the information – just as they do over councillors' allowances. While these things are usually a nine-day-wonder I do think that it is a regrettable coincidence that the figures will be published for the first time just as the Postal Ballot papers are dropping through the doors for the NE referendum. This will be exploited by the 'NO' campaign and I think it would be grossly unfair if our campaign were to be damaged by temporary negative publicity when referendums in other regions will come after the press have had their fun and people are

able to take a more sober and sensible look at the information made available.

Party Conference saw the production of the **'Ten Point Plan'** for a Third Term. Policies on **Housing, Training, Schools, Health, Childcare, Pensions, Science, Crime, Fairness at Work and Foreign Policy**, will spearhead our next election campaign..

I was invited by the government of Gibraltar to join a delegation of MPs to help celebrate **Gibraltar National Day** and the 300th anniversary of the signing of the treaty making Gibraltar British territory.



Constituency

The **Parliamentary Boundaries Commission** is now preparing to look at constituency boundaries in Tyne and Wear. If the statistics are correct it looks like we will lose a constituency in Tyne and Wear with the current 13 seats going down to 12. This is part of an overall reorganisation of boundaries in England but new boundaries will not come into effect until the general election after next.

I was in attendance at Baltic when the announcement was made that Gateshead is to host the **World Culture Conference** and later that day accepted a cheque from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the creation of a Heritage Centre at **St Mary's Church, Gateshead**. I joined Minister **Nick Raynsford** when he visited our constituency to see new housing developments in Gateshead.

I have had meetings with Nexus to talk about **local bus services** and other transport issues. I spent two days campaigning in **Hartlepool** to help out in the by-election there which saw a very satisfactory outcome for a Party in it's 8th year of government and in the current political atmosphere.