

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

David Clelland MP

www.david-clelland.org

3 February 2005



The 'It's Your Call' Campaign

Never mind Downing Street, it's our streets where the government is actually making a difference to our quality of life and, as part of that ongoing campaign, Home Office Minister Hazel Blears chose to launch the national 'It's your Call' helpline in North Benwell, Newcastle. Leaflets will be distributed, giving a telephone number—0845 505 2222—which people can call, anonymously if they wish, to report low level crime - vandalism, graffiti, anti-social behaviour. The Minister also met with local residents to hear first hand how the government's policies were having an impact on crime and disorder.



Tsunami Charity Appeal



I joined fellow guests at a charity event organised by a local Thai restaurant owner at the Federation Brewery to raise badly needed funds for the Thai communities still devastated by the tsunami disaster. The event raised an impressive £43,000.

SureStart, Deckham

To you and me, it looks like a building site but to the Deckham councillors and the community, it represents the culmination of several years of lobbying, persuading and sheer dedication to ensure that the people of Deckham have a one-stop shop for families, especially those with young children. The evidence is overwhelming - pre-school children attending a centre like this do better at school, their mums get much-needed support, parents get help in learning and training as well as in parenting skills, and there are even improvements in family health.

And the Surestart programme is one of many that would be axed by the Tories!

Kung Hey Fat Choi! (Happy New Year)

I was able to help celebrate the handing over of the beautiful Chinese Arch in Stowell Street by the construction company to the City Council. The arch will be officially opened on 13th February just in time for the Chinese New Year.



Comment

For once, good news about **Iraq** as thousands of citizens voted in free elections for the first time in their lives and at great personal risk. Yes, it was against a background of violence, and yes, electoral enthusiasm was geographically patchy. But only two years ago, the country was in the sway of a ruthless dictator and dissent was punished by torture and summary execution.

No-one expected these first free elections to be perfect, especially when one of the leading foreign insurgents had the slogan 'if you vote, you die' but the elections are a moving demonstration that freedom and democracy are universal values to which all men and women aspire.

The weekend's elections were for a **transitional National Assembly** of 275 members. It will elect a three person Presidency which will appoint a Prime Minister and Cabinet and then draw up a new constitution for Iraq.

The Government continues to pump resources directly into those areas affected by the **tsunami**. We can't help those who died but we can, and must, do what we can to rebuild their shattered communities. Foreign policy is not about war - it's about making life better in the rest of the world and I was heartened by the headline place that Africa is finally occupying. Thanks in great part to the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer.

2005 is important because British chairmanship of the G7 and G8 countries will lead us to the **UN Millennium Summit** in September, and a discussion of the Millennium development goals. And, after the response to the tsunami, for the first time millions more

people are understanding just how closely and irrevocably we are all bound together.



Parliament

Coming so soon after the Queen's Speech, the last few weeks have seen the Second Readings of many of the Bills announced. The **Child Benefit Bill** - which extends financial support to unwaged 19 year olds in training or completing a course; the **Constitutional Reform Bill** that reforms the office of the Lord Chancellor and creates a new Supreme Court to replace the House of Lords as the final appeal court, and the **Drugs Bill**, designed to increase the ability of the police and the courts to tackle drug dealers.

The **Railways Bill** completed its Report Stage and Third Reading. I was a member of the standing committee that scrutinised the bill. It is a good bill overall, but it nevertheless contains restraints on PTEs that are not entirely compatible with the decentralisation implied in the bill and we will continue to push for further amendments in the Lords.

At Prime Minister's Question time I drew the Prime Minister's attention to the developments on the **Gateshead quayside**, particularly **Sage Gateshead** and in DTI Questions, I commented upon the work that a company in the constituency - **PB Power** on the Newcastle Business Park - was doing rebuilding electricity supply in Iraq.

I met with the Defence Minister to talk about the future of **HMS Calliope** on the Gateshead quayside. I also met with delegations from the developing democracy of Bahrain and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegations from Singapore and Nigeria.

I have also met with representatives from Passenger Transport Executives and attended meetings of the Northern Group of Labour MPs.



Constituency

I was very pleased to be able to welcome Home Office Minister **Hazel Blears** to the constituency. The launch of the '**Its Your Call**' scheme is part of the wider approach for tackling the anti-social behaviour that too often blights our quality of life. It recognises that 'top-down' strategies don't often work. What is needed is significant community involvement. And that is what the scheme encourages.

The negative coverage in the local newspapers about the **Labour Party Spring Conference** at Sage Gateshead is reprehensible. It is a shame that the local press cannot be more supportive of the region.

For the first time ever, the area will be hosting a hugely prestigious and highly significant conference. Coming as it does while election expectations are so high, the eyes of the world will be literally upon us, raising the profile of Newcastle Gateshead, and bringing thousands of people to the area for the first time, spending in our hotels, bars and restaurants.

They will take away important impressions of our area. And what happens? The local newspapers whinge on about cost and inconvenience and take political pot-shots at the government.

What would they have said if Labour had not supported the area and went off to Manchester or Birmingham instead?