

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party **Parliamentary Report**

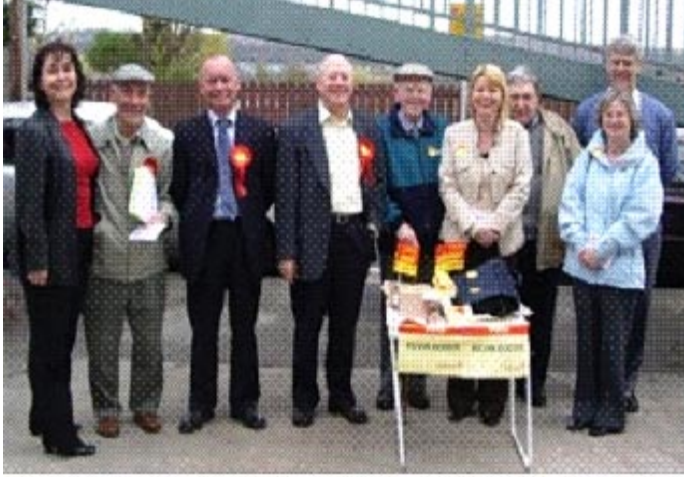
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Local Elections 2006



Parliamentary commitments made it difficult to do as much as I would have wished help out in the council election campaigns. I was able to spend some time in every ward however, either leafleting, canvassing or with the loudspeaker on election day itself. (Pictured, left, with the Lobley Hill and Bensham team)

International Worker's Memorial Day



My speech at the simple ceremony, held annually in Gateshead's Saltwell Park, where a memorial stone commemorates workers who have lost their lives in the workplace, gave me the opportunity to call for the speedy introduction of legislation on corporate manslaughter.

Newcastle College's New Centre of Vocational Excellence in Technical and Professional Studies



Retirement of Cllr Ken Childs

Bridges Ward Councillor Ken Childs has retired from office and is pictured receiving a retirement gift from the Mayor. Ken has been a hard working and skilled local councillor, dedicated and committed to representing his local community and I join those in thanking him for his work and wishing him well for the future.

I attended the opening of Newcastle College's new centre at the West End College in Scotswood's John Marley Centre. Building on the success of the College's award-winning Centre of Vocational Excellence in Construction, the new centre offers teaching of engineering skills - architectural principles, knowledge of building materials, building design and construction etc, all supported by state of the art equipment and facilities thanks to sponsorship by nationally and internationally renowned civil engineering companies. (pictured right with college principal Jackie Fisher)



Comment

With foreign convicts on the loose, questions about 'cash for honours', a fiasco over tax credits, hair cuts in election expenses, rows over the health service, revelations from John Prescott's former diary secretary - fighting the local elections was like going into battle and being shelled from your own side. We were never going to have an easy victory at this point in the government's life, but the last 5/6 weeks have been amongst the worst for fighting an election that I can remember.

However, despite such terrible circumstances, the Lib Dems scarcely made any further progress in the region and the Tories continued to flat-line. Only one seat was lost in Gateshead - and I suspect demographic changes played a huge part in that - and the Libs could take little comfort from the results in Newcastle.

This election showed that those who have *directly* benefited from Labour's policies - from the Minimum Wage, Winter Fuel Allowance, free eye tests for pensioners, record rises in child benefits, family tax credits, the virtual eradication of youth unemployment, free bus travel etc - will continue to vote Labour. But those who have not benefited so directly, who have supported Labour principles in the past as a *concept*, were disinclined to put the cross in the Labour box.

And indeed, the picture in the south of England was different, with the Tories making some gains, particularly in London although Labour won back Lambeth. But, to put it in context, the Tories completely failed to make their breakthrough in the big cities, and their performance was modest for what is supposed to be still a honeymoon with Cameron and at a disastrous time for Labour.

Once the foreign prisoners' scandal broke, it was on the cards that Charles Clarke would have to go, and John Prescott's future looked similarly uncertain. Hence the extensive re-shuffle over the weekend, which sadly did little to quell the speculation as to precisely when the Prime Minister will quit.

This continued speculation is a poisonous distraction from the business of government: it is certainly not in the interests of the country or of those who voted Labour here in the North East.

In a powerful address to the PLP Tony Blair made it clear that he will deliver on his commitment to arrange an orderly transition to a new leader. We have to trust him on that and calm the frenzy that is too often driven by individual ambition rather than the interests of Party or Country.



Parliament

Not surprisingly in the circumstances, the (then) Home Secretary has made regular Statements to the House since Easter concerning the **detention and removal of foreign prisoners**.

The subject was also raised during Prime Minister's Questions, with Tories seeking to make political capital just days before the local elections. *I decided it was time for a more positive view and asked the PM - "Apart from the minimum wage, statutory holidays, Sure Start, low unemployment, low mortgages, free eye tests, prescriptions, TV licences, bus travel, and the £200 winter fuel allowance for pensioners, 2 million children and pensioners taken out of poverty, more teachers, nurses, doctors and police, and lower crime, hospital waiting lists and class sizes, what has the Labour Government done for us?"*

Other **Statements** included those about progress on the **Darfur Peace Talks**, **NHS Foundation Trusts** and the announcement of plans for 69 new interview centres in major cities to facilitate **passports** for first time applicants, and the results of the investigation in fatal shootings in Iraq in 2003. **Debates** have included those on the Second Reading of the **Finance Bill**, the **Northern Ireland Bill** and the **Housing Corporation Bill**.

I attended meetings of the **PLP**, the **Northern Group** and the newly-created executive of local authority lobbying group **Sigoma**, the **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association**, the **Engineering Association** and **One North East's** tourism presentation.

I met with Defence Minister **Don Touhig**, about re-locating **HMS Calliope** further down the river. Mr Touhig has ceased to be a Minister. I have now raised the issue with the new Minister Tom Watson.



I attended the **South Shields' Constituency Labour Party** dinner addressed by Alan Johnson.



Pictured with Alan Johnson and Tyne Bridge Chair Ian Mearns with partner Anne.

So sad when a fantastic career, starred by outstanding achievements, and touching the lives of millions comes to an end, but now its time to move on. No, not Tony Blair this time, but Alan Shearer - we wish him well and thank him for his contribution to football and the North East.