

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Above with Amicus General Secretary Derek Simpson and Regional Secretary Davey Hall in discussion with a delegate

Unite for Manufacturing

I attended the 'Unite for Manufacturing' Conference, organised by NTUC in an attempt to bring together unions, government and employers to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing what is a dwindling sector of the economy, particularly in the north-east, and the positive and practical action needed to support and encourage manufacturing industry. A more pro-active role from government would help - the Highways Agency's Article 14 orders, for instance, are stifling development just when we want to encourage employers to stay in the region and expand.

Bus Services



I've spoken briefly to **Bernard Garner**, the new chief executive of the Passenger Transport Authority (above) about my concerns relating to local bus services, and will have a more detailed discussion with him soon. Overleaf are more details about ways in which I think we should be regaining control of our local bus services.

Dunston Teams By-Election

The campaign is now well under way with canvassing and leafleting, and there is considerable support for a petition about local bus services organised by candidate **Pauline Dillon**. As the election has fallen during the parliamentary recess I glad to be able to devote more time to it but *can I urge all members to spare an hour or two to help out in this important election.*

Wannabe Wayne Rooneys and Alan Shearers can now practice their ball skills in what I consider to be Britain's best park!

Having spent my childhood living next to and playing in **Saltwell park**, I was delighted when Barclays Bank asked me to open a new all-weather playing facility, suitable for football and basket ball, that they have sponsored in the Park.

(right with youngsters taking part in a summer-long five a side competition)

All-Weather Pitch Opening



Summer Fairs

I'm always glad to be able to support local community summer fairs, pictured right with the Mayor opening the **Lobley Hill and Bensham** fair and below, with the Mayor and Consort at the **Felling** Fair, with its impressive Labour Party stand.



Comment

Frankly, I view the activities of some of my colleagues over the last week or so as dangerous and irresponsible. Calling for clarification from the PM as to when the 'orderly transition' is to take place is one thing; mounting what was very close to a coup is quite another.

On this subject, in my May and June Parliamentary reports (see web site)

I said,

'This continued speculation is a poisonous distraction from the business of government; it is certainly not in the interests of the country or those who voted Labour here in the North East' and 'his announcement that he would not be seeking re-election has left a state of uncertainty that is at the heart of our present difficulties and needs to be clarified soon.'

I therefore welcome the clear statement from Tony that he will step down from the leadership of the party in time for a new leader and Prime Minister to be elected next year. That ought to be the end of the speculation and I hope that this now allows the government and the Party to get on with their jobs.

This is extremely important and we should remember that it was just such divisions that kept the Tories in power to decimate the country's manufacturing and industrial base, condemning millions of workers and their families to the scrapheap. Watching the Gadarene swine in action was anguish then; and it is anguish now.

I know that some of my colleagues are anxious to get their backsides on the seats of ministerial cars but patience in this case is not only a virtue but a necessity.

Further, we now have plenty of time to think about the matter and clarify the direction of the Party and the government under a new leader.

I for one will want to know about how policies on local government, transport, regional inequalities, energy, foreign policy, third world debt and poverty etc, will be progressed under the new leader.



Constituency

It is vital that we now focus on our by-election campaign in **Dunston and Teams**. Our candidate **Pauline Dillon** seeks to focus on *local* issues - cuts and changes in bus services, petty crime and anti-social behaviour, and wider opportunities for youngsters - in what is a hotly contested campaign, with BNP, Lib Dem and Tory candidates also standing.

Already we have seen the usual lies from other parties - rumours about the Dunston post office closing and barmy scare stories about plans to replace some houses and a care home with a landfill site!

The major disadvantage of privatisation of **bus services** was the loss of local control. The introduction of 'Quality Contracts' by the government theoretically gives some leverage to transport authorities over when and where services should be provided, but I think we need a more robust system, and I shall be pressing for a Bill to restore the local regulation of bus services by introducing a new and effective franchising system.

Perhaps then we can reverse some of the cuts in services we have had to suffer, and provide the kind of reliable and affordable public transport system that is so vital if people are to be encouraged to leave their cars at home.

As one of the few MPs who has actually held a 'real' job in manufacturing and engineering, and benefited from an engineering apprenticeship, I am extremely concerned by the loss of skilled **manufacturing** jobs from the UK and from the region in particular.

It's not true - nor acceptable in my view - to say 'we can do nothing'. The manufacturing sector does not exist in a vacuum; it is the basis of economic growth, a provider of

highly skilled jobs, reducing unemployment and poverty, contributing to social and economic cohesion.

Government already intervenes by giving tax and other incentives to support businesses by promoting skills, innovation, research and development. Although too little of the latter in the North East. And of course there is no doubt that the stable economy our Government has created is a big asset.

I believe we can do more. In Gateshead in particular, I have long complained about the stifling effect of the **Highways Agency's Article 14 orders** which check development - and is why I brought Roads Minister Stephen Ladyman here in July to see for himself. But more generally, what about government procurement? What about help with exports and R&D? And what about returning to the concept of Regional Investment banks to help small business develop and grow by investing in them rather than giving often wasteful grants.

Success! I have spoken to, written and lobbied successive ministers about the fact that people claiming benefits who do voluntary work could not claim the costs of their meals - and had to meet the cost out of their benefits. This was unfair, as meals cost more. Volunteers are vital to so much of value in our community. Claimants are actively encouraged to volunteer and volunteering plays a huge part in helping people back into work by developing confidence and acquiring skills. The Minister has now replied to me to say that he agrees with me and that **meals will now be treated as an expense that volunteers can claim back.**

Finally, I am now campaigning to create a list of **honest contractors** that elderly people in Gateshead can refer to for household repairs, to help combat rogue traders who often rip off vulnerable people and rob them of their hard earned savings. It is a system that works well elsewhere and I have written to ministers and will meet with the council.