

# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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## Thank You

*My sincere gratitude to party members who supported me in the selection process for the Parliamentary candidate for the new Gateshead Constituency. I will work hard to win the confidence of those who did not. It was a very proud moment for me, to be selected for the constituency in which I was born and brought up and represented as a local councillor, and I pledge to continue to represent Gateshead's interests locally and nationally to the best of my ability. I know that it has been a very difficult and trying process for all concerned but we now have a Gateshead constituency and the opportunity to forge a strong and vibrant new party. I hope that we can now move on and work together to focus our activities not only on the forthcoming local elections in May but also on the future development and growth of our Party and the improvement of the lives of all in our community right across the constituency.*

### Trade Union Education Centre Opening



*Nothing too good for the workers! And Newcastle College's new national TUC Education Centre, opened by Gordon Brown, is a wonderful example of the way in which trade unions are continuing to fulfil their historic role by working in partnership with government and business to develop and improve the skills that their members need to get into work and to do the jobs of the future.*

*(left, listening to Gordon Brown)*

### Gateshead Police - Allan Curry

After 5 years as Gateshead's Police Chief Superintendent, Allan Curry is taking up a new post at Force HQ. I joined councillors, officers and citizens to wish Allan well, and to thank him for his contribution to making Gateshead a safer place to live.

*(pictured below with Cllr Brian Richmond, Allan Curry and Cllr Mick Henry)*



### Carers' Allowance - Petition Presented

Thanks to support from party members, carers, the Gateshead Carers' Association and carers' groups, the on-line petition I set up in September calling for a review of the Carers' Allowance and the replacement of the 'all-or-nothing' rule with a sliding scale grew to just over



3,000 signatures. We presented the petition to Downing Street to mark Carers' Rights Day, and met with the Minister to discuss the issues.

*(above with Gateshead Carers' Association members Jimmy Miller, Graeme Lyall, the Minister Anne McGuire, Debbie Sales and Elsie Johnson; and left, outside Downing Street)*



### Elgin Centre Christmas Fair

I was delighted to be able to join Cllr Brian Coates and members of the community for the start of the Centre's Christmas celebrations.



## Comment

So, symbolically at the start of a New Year, we have the opportunity to start a clean sheet with a new constituency. It will be an important year, not only for the fledgling Gateshead Party, but also for the Party nationally.

Our first challenge will be the **local elections in May**. Last year's elections were virtually conducted under fire from our own side, never mind the opposition! I hope that Ruth Kelly's choice of private sector education for her son is not the beginning of a similar wave of embarrassments for those of us on the ground!

Then, later in the year, we will have **Party leadership and deputy leadership elections**. Inevitably, the press will regurgitate the usual accusations of uncertainty and confusion over policy direction - but hopefully, that will only apply to the Tories!

But the leadership election, even though there might only be one candidate, still offers a forum for all members to debate and discuss the Party's future direction.

I have been greatly encouraged by some of **Gordon Brown's** recent speeches - not least his speech at the opening of the Trade Union Education Centre - and his hints of a refreshing new approach to Labour in government. The leadership election campaign, even with one candidate, will provide the opportunity to discuss policies that have been ignored or ridiculed in the past few years; the deputy leadership campaigns, with more front runners than the Grand National, most certainly will!

*I know that many Party members share my concern that a throwback to patronage and privatisation, top-down management and centralised control won't lead us to victory next time. A new Leader will provide the opportunity to refresh the Party and the Government - we should grab it.*

## Parliament

With Christmas and the New Year over, Parliament has resumed work and the programme outlined in the Queen's Speech is well under way. This week saw the remaining stages of the **Welfare Reform Bill** and the **Statistics and Registration Service Bill**. Legislation dealt with before the House rose for Christmas included the Second Readings of the **Digital Switch-over Bill**, **Offender Management Bill**, and the Third Reading of the long-awaited **Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Bill**. This Bill isn't perfect but, with amendments made in committee, it represent a huge step forward and offers an effective way hold companies, if not individuals, to account where negligence results in death.

As always, further details of any Bills presented to the House can be obtained from my office.

The Prime Minister also initiated a debate in the country about **Trident** by making a Statement on the Government's decision to maintain the UK's independent nuclear deterrent. The world has changed dramatically since Britain acquired a nuclear deterrent half a century ago, and the question has to be asked whether it is wise to keep it in very different times. What good are nuclear weapons against terrorism? On the other hand, can we take the risk of giving them up, at a time when the only certain thing about our world today is the uncertainty?

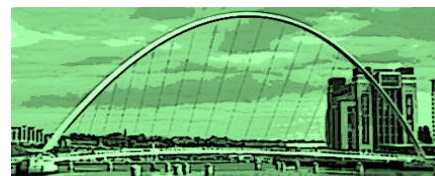
I was also able to press the Transport Minister in debate on the **dualling of the A1** by emphasising that whilst the scheme was a high priority for the region, there were insufficient funds to do the work.

In addition to the usual Northern Group and PLP meetings, I have met with **Bernard Garner**, the Chief Executive of the transport

executive, Nexus. I also met with Defence Minister Derek Twigg to talk about **HMS Calliope**, without much obvious progress on my suggestion to move it down river to purpose-built and designed premises on the former McNulty shipyard. But, I was told, the Navy has no money to effect a move - it's clearly all gone on the millions spent on the refurbishment of the Ministry of Defence.



I presented a book to the Chief Executive of **'Book Aid'** which collects books and distributes them in the Third World.



## Constituency

The usual round of constituency surgeries have taken place with nothing in particular to report.

The month has seen the sad passing of two of Gateshead's great political figures.

I attended the funerals of **Len Edmondson**, a giant of a man who was one of Tyneside's great trade union officials, serving my own union the AEU/AMICUS with great distinction for many years and who was active in the pensioners' movement right until his death, and of my dear friend and former Gateshead council colleague, **Steve Nugent**. Steve was a wonderful person, a true socialist, and a mentor to me and to many other Gateshead party members. I shall miss his advice, his wit and intellect but mostly I shall miss his deep and loyal friendship.