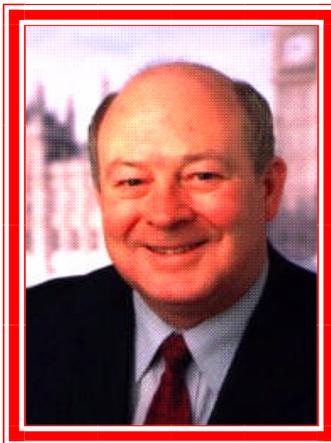


Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Is it a bird? Is it a plane.....?

No, it wasn't Tony's resignation that made me want to jump off the Tyne Bridge, but support for the Anthony Nolan Trust. When bone marrow is destroyed by disease or by treatment to eradicate leukaemia, a bone marrow transplant gives the best chance of recovery. But only 30% of patients are lucky enough to find a tissue match within their family, the rest rely on strangers who've volunteered to donate their bone marrow. The Trust maintains a database of bone marrow donors but it costs £70 to tissue-type each donor and, like all charities, the Trust desperately needs money to continue its work and to expand its database. Thanks to those who sponsored me, other donations can be by cheque (payable to the Anthony Nolan Trust) to me at the House of Commons (London SW1A 0AA) or on-line. Call my office for help or advice - 420 0300. Even a couple of pounds will help



Go for Jobs Travel Ticket Scheme



I joined the chief executives of the North East Chamber of Commerce and Nexus at the Gateshead metro station for the launch of a corporate travel card scheme, an initiative that offers major discounts off bus, Metro and train fares in a bid to reduce congestion on our roads and boost public transport usage, as well as cutting staff travel costs and helping to boost the region's economic development.



Mo Mowlem

I joined Newcastle Labour Leader John O'Shea at a ceremony marking the 10th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Agreement by unveiling a plaque on the house where Mo lived in Newcastle.



North East Coast Rail Forum

I organised, and chaired, a successful forum between business, local government, members of the community and the bidders for the East Coast Rail franchise. Commercial considerations meant that we could not discuss the fine detail of each bid but we may well have been able to influence the bids before their final submission to the Department of Transport.



Workers' Rights

As a life-long and active trade unionist, I have spent much of my working life doing what I can to support the rights of the workers. I joined staff at Tesco's to help promote their



campaign to treat shop workers with respect, and I also attended a simple ceremony in Saltwell Park to remember those who have been injured or killed at work.

Comment

History will, I think, be kinder to **Tony Blair** than many of his current critics, including many Party members. Elected with almost impossibly high expectations in 1997, I believe he genuinely did what he thought was right and best for his country.

But - as **local elections** showed - he has bequeathed a party at its lowest for 25 years, and the country in a sour mood. I was able to do at least some work in every Gateshead ward during the campaign. It was uphill work - better than last year but the pauses and the hesitation from residents when canvassed are a reminder that politics is as much about atmosphere and mood as policies. And unfortunately, all the improvements over the last 10 years have been banked and forgotten - never mind a strong economy; tax credits that didn't exist pre-1997; NHS waiting lists halved, best ever school results.....

Like an old married couple, voters now just take a Labour Government for granted. Iraq popped up occasionally, but a key theme on the doorstep was the Labour leadership. Voters felt that everything was vague and drifting at the top, and prolonging the vacuum with a 6 week **leadership election process** won't help either.

Having said that - generally - analysis of the voting figures show a slight swing to Labour in Gateshead and a slight decrease in the Lib Dem vote. But, with little evidence of the much-vaunted Tory revival in either Gateshead or the North, there was also the paradox of a decrease in the Labour majority in some wards, where intense and sustained work had taken place over the last 12 months.

Congratulations to all our candidates for good, solid campaigning, and welcome to our new councillors!

4 gains from the Lib Dems in Newcastle were marred by the loss of Newburn and Labour Leader John O'Shea. Call me suspicious but a 60% increase in the Lib Dem Vote with virtually every one of the increased turn-out going to a single party???

So, where now? Gordon Brown, Chancellor for 10 years, has a huge hurdle to overcome - he has to electrify the stale political air with new ideas, inspire a jaded electorate with new directions, and enthuse a new generation of Labour supporters. I think he can.



Parliament

Gordon Brown delivered his eleventh **Budget** in March. Hailed as a Budget for Britain's families, he announced that education spending would rise to its highest ever level, Child Benefit will rise over the next 3 years to £20 per week, and the child element in tax credits will rise by £150 per year. The basic rate of income tax was cut from 22p to 20p from April 2008; adult rate Minimum Wage increased to £5.52 per hour. An increase in pensioners' tax allowance will take 600,000 pensioners out of paying income tax altogether.

Other legislation has included the **Mental Health Bill**, the **Pensions Bill**, the **UK Borders Bill**, **Welfare Reform Bill** and **Concessionary Fares Bill**.

I was able to quiz Sir Rod Eddington when he attended a hearing of the **Transport Select Committee**. His report on the UK's transport infrastructure is disappointing and unambitious. I remain concerned about the absence of a high-speed north/south rail link, the region's inadequate road infrastructure, and the effects that both of these will have on the region's future productivity, stability and

economic growth.

I have spoken in two separate debates on **concessionary travel** and attended a meeting with **Tyne and Wear Fire Authority** as well as meetings about **Bridging Newcastle Gateshead** and the **Northern Way**. I also met with representatives from **S&N Breweries**, and **Passenger Transport Executives**, as well as joining colleagues from both Houses to discuss possible future directions for the campaign for House of Lords' Reform.



Constituency

In addition to the engagements on the front page, I and fellow Gateshead MP Dave Anderson met with the Leader and Chief Officers from **Gateshead Council**. Following on from concerns raised there, I organised useful meetings with Local Government Minister **Yvette Cooper** and Roads Minister **Stephen Ladyman**.

I also attended the **Association of North East Council's Conference** 'Transport: The Way Forward'.

Without a modern, fast and efficient transport infrastructure, the region will continue to lag behind in terms of economic development. And until we have an equally modern, efficient and affordable public transport system, we cannot reasonably expect to prise people out of their cars by introducing road-pricing schemes.

I also met with officials from the **North East Chamber of Commerce**.

Finally, I am delighted to announce that **Ken Childs** has agreed to act as my agent. Ken combines meticulous accuracy and efficiency with aplomb and will do the job brilliantly, for me and for the Party.