

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

David Clelland MP

www.david-clelland.org.uk

10 April 2008



UK-Japan 21st century Group

For the first time, this annual conference was held in North East England and I was delighted to be able to join members of the delegation at a reception hosted by One North East at The Sage Gateshead. Unfortunately they arrived from Terminal 5's first day of operation minus luggage. I can confirm that the Japanese do have a sense of humour.

(left, with Ambassador Peter Sato and Tadashi Yamamoto, President of the Japan Centre for International Exchange)



Hilton Hotel Visit



Gateshead Students' Visit to Parliament



We always have a good discussion, covering a wide range of issues when the students visit Parliament. This year was particularly good timing - I was then able to tell Transport Ministers about the need for concessionary travel for young people in education or training.

BBC School Report



I took part in the BBC project 'School Report', a project that aims to give young people the opportunity to experience different forms of media and to write, interview and present news items. (right, answering questions from Joseph Swan students in a radio interview)

I had a long-standing arrangement to visit the Hilton Hotel, Ironically, it coincided with the Tory Party Conference in Gateshead. (Pictured with John Rogers, Hilton Northern regional Vice President and Darren Cooke, Director of Operations)

Bangladesh Independence Day Celebrations



I was pleased to be able to join members of the Gateshead Bangladeshi community for their Independence Day celebrations. Undoubtedly, the nation was born

out of bloody conflict, forcing many citizens from their homes in the most traumatic circumstances. But time has moved on. Whilst the memories remain, a new generation of Bangladeshi British are making a fantastic contribution to our community.

BAE School Roadshow



BAE Systems puts on well presented plays and discussion groups in schools to encourage youngsters to think about engineering as a future career. (pictured in an engineering stage-prop with BAE Scotswood Managing

Director Jim Imrie and children from St Joseph's School in Gateshead.

Comment

The barrage of media interest into MP's pay/expenses/allowances continues. Let's not forget the basic point - the system of allowances for a second home and associated running costs was brought in so that ordinary working class people could become Members of Parliament as opposed to the old system whereby MPs were drawn wholly from the moneyed classes who already owned homes in London.

Doubtless the Establishment would rather the working classes learnt their place. Certainly the story at the weekend about the money spent on the refurbishment of the Speaker's accommodation' completely ignored the fact that it wasn't Mr Martin's own property that was being refurbished but 'the Speaker's official Residence' in the Palace of Westminster. The Residence is used for official functions - visits by heads of state for instance - and will be used by Speakers for the next 300 years as it has been for the last 300. But the Establishment cannot stomach that a former sheet metal worker should hold such high office - what was a whispering campaign denigrating his abilities for some years has now become a fully-fledged anti-working class campaign by snooty journalists.

The **local government election campaign** is now underway. As usual, there will be two peaks - the first when the postal votes go out on 21 April and then a second wave before 1 May. I urge everyone to try to give at least an hour to their ward to help get the leaflets out. I'll do my best to get round as many of Gateshead's wards as I can.

Polls indicate something of a Tory revival, I'll believe it when I see it in the North East. Certainly the Lib Dems are worried - their anticipated revival under the new leadership has failed to happen, despite new leader Nick Clegg's boasting of his sexual

proress (goodness knows which section of the electorate that was aimed at) but he seems to be earning the soubriquet 'Nick Cleggover'. And a leading Gateshead Lib Dem councillor has a strange way of rewarding Lib Dem local voters- many of whom are in fact Tories - when he described Conservatives as 'vermin' on his website.



Parliament

Party Deputy Leader and Leader of the House **Harriet Harman** confounded many of her critics at last week's Prime Minister's Question time when she gave a brilliant performance at the despatch box. Deputising for Gordon Brown, Harriet had clever-clogs William Hague tied up in knots and probably wishing he was wearing the flak-jacket that the Daily Mail so criticised her for using as she walked around her constituency days before.

Much of early March saw the continuation of the Debate on the Budget, but legislation included the significant **Local Transport Bill**. I spoke in the debate, saying the Bill is long over-due - the 20 year decline in bus ridership has been matched by 20 years of very healthy profits for the bus companies, as they cherry-pick the most profitable routes and leave many of our communities with poor or non-existent bus services.

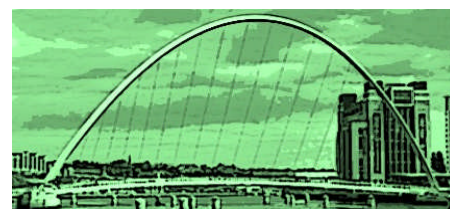
The Bill seeks to redress that by allowing transport authorities to package a number of routes, both the profitable and the less so but which provide a lifeline to small communities, and inviting the bus companies to tender for the whole package.

I also welcomed Gateshead College students to the Houses of Parliament, attended a meeting of the **Passenger Transport Authorities Group** and hosted a

reception for small retailers, anxious to help the government in its policy of restricting the purchase of certain products by age but equally anxious for their businesses to thrive.

In my capacity as member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association executive and chair of the Turks and Caicos Group, I also met with the **Turks and Caicos Education Minister**.

Following last year's budget and our discussions here in Gateshead Labour Party I wrote to Treasury ministers pointing out the consequences of abolishing the **10p tax rate** for some people on low earnings. I was under the impression that this was being looked into and would be addressed in this budget. Regrettably ministers have been unable to resolve this issue and I have joined those Labour MPs who are insisting this should be revisited.



Constituency

I met with representatives from **Northumbrian Water** to discuss future plans.

The **BAE Schools Road Show** visited St Joseph's school and I joined representatives and spoke to the children about my own experiences as an engineering apprentice.

Tory shadow chancellor George Osborne was gob-smacked to find me waiting in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel when he arrived for the **Tory Party Spring Conference**. I told him I hoped they spent lots of money here but not to expect too much in the way of a welcome from Tory voters who tend to vote Lib Dem in Gateshead and Newcastle.