

# *Gateshead Constituency Labour Party* **Parliamentary Report**

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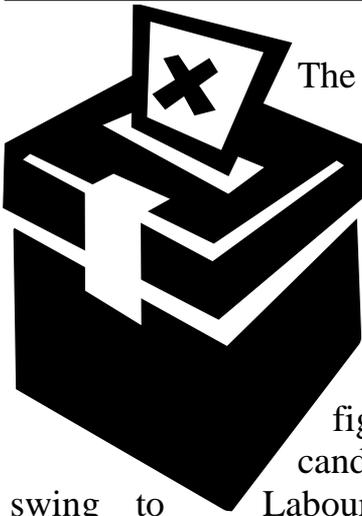
## *Local and London Elections*

The picture might as well be in black!

May 1 was the worst electoral defeat that the Labour Party has received for four decades. Once the scale of the meltdown became clear, it became obvious that even the political alchemy that has protected Ken Livingstone had run out, and London capitulated to Boris Johnson. Here in Gateshead, the story was slightly different, and my sincere congratulations to all those successful candidates. My commiserations to those who put up a good fight. Yes, we did lose a Labour seat in *Winlaton* (and the Labour candidate has been forceful in giving me her comments) but there was a

swing to Labour in some wards and particularly in the hard fought seats of *Lobley Hill and Bensham* and *Winlaton* with the Lib Dem vote in the latter down some 300.

(more election analysis over the page)



## *Gateshead Car Park*



A recent survey put the Gateshead Angel and Hadrian's Wall as Britain's two most recognisable landmarks, ahead of Trafalgar Square and St Paul's Cathedral. I think Gateshead's 'get Carter' multi-storey car park probably rates as a recognisable icon too, in fact it was probably Gateshead's first post-war icon! The car park will soon make way for the redevelopment of the town centre but I was glad to be one of those to take a last opportunity to go up to the top and take in the view for one last time.

Notwithstanding the views it offers up and down the Tyne valley, I will not be sorry to see it go, particularly as it will be replaced by a well planned and well designed, modern town centre, truly fit for purpose and what the people of Gateshead deserve.

## *Gateshead College*



And, talking of iconic buildings, I was delighted to be able to visit the newly-completed College building. It's a state of the art facility offering wonderful opportunities to young people from Gateshead and beyond.

(above with principal David Cheetham)

## Comment

.When people feel secure, confident and optimistic about the future, they will vote for the national government that provides that 'feel good' factor.

That wasn't the case on 1 May when the consequences of the 'credit crunch' as it spreads from America, rising petrol prices, rising utility bills and food prices, disputed pay offers for police, teachers and some civil servants and then, to cap it all, the furore over the abolition of the 10p tax band led Labour into the worst results for 40 years with only a 24% share of the vote.

People on the doorstep were telling us, very clearly - and whether they were directly affected or not - that people on the lowest incomes paying a disproportionate amount of tax wasn't their idea of what a **Labour** government should be doing. Explanations that before the Labour government introduced the 10p tax band in 1999, taxation - even for the lowest earners - was at 23%, higher than the recently introduced 20%, cut no ice. And the announcement that those affected would be compensated came too late to assuage angry postal voters. Certainly Lib Dems in Gateshead knew an opportunity when it hit them in the face - leaflets they put out across the borough said quite openly, 'forget local issues (*fortuitously, as that is where they are weakest*) -

vote against Gordon Brown on 1 May'. And many did.

But Gordon came out fighting over the weekend, saying that he *is* listening, and that he will sort out the problems with the 10p tax band and the wider economic problems.

It will now be two years before the next local elections - there will be European elections next year - and we must now begin preparations. Perhaps with a 'Know Your Councillor' campaign to expose the poor quality of Lib Dem councillors when compared with Labour councillors and candidates.



## Parliament

I attended the Funeral Service for Gwyneth Dunwoody MP, who died suddenly last month. Gwyneth was truly a feisty and independently-minded socialist. I have been acting as Chairman of the Transport Select Committee pending the election of a new Chairman - I am not seeking the position myself.

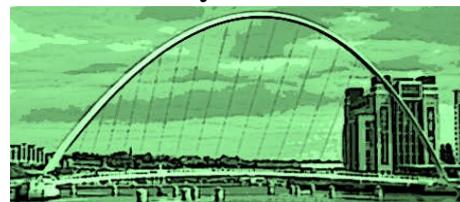
Apart from the remaining stages of both the **Pensions Bill** and the **Energy Bill**, the **Finance Bill** has been the main subject of debate since my last report. The Bill, effectively a ratification of last year's Budget proposals, is of course why we have had the discussion about the abolition of the 10p tax band. The Chancellor subsequently announced his commitment to directly helping those disadvantaged by using the

Winter Fuel Allowance and other mechanisms to help those who lost out.

I put it to the Transport Minister during question time that the best way to achieve successful local transport policies is to ensure that transport authorities continue to be made up of democratically elected and accountable councillors and I also spoke in the Debate held earlier on the Local Transport Bill that intends to change the governance of Transport authorities.

I attended the PLP Transport Committee meeting where Ruth Kelly outlined plans for dealing with the huge number of deaths and injuries caused by young drivers.

I attended a 'Send My Friend To School' reception, aimed at improving education in the Third World, met with representatives from British Telecom, Northumbria Water and supported calls for a new Bank Holiday



## Constituency

I attended a meeting with Gateshead's PCT chief executive to discuss the future of Dunston Hill Hospital, and I met with the Leader of Gateshead Council. I was glad to have the chance to work alongside dedicated Party workers in a number of wards during the local election campaign..