

# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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12 June 2008



## *Lord Tom Burlison of Rowlands Gill*

It was with shock and great sadness that I learned of the death of Tom Burlison, friend and colleague to all in the Labour and trade union movement in the north east. Modest and unassuming, you could not wish to meet a nicer man. Tom was a straightforward working bloke, dedicated to his party and his union, serving both well - he was GMB regional secretary then deputy general secretary as well as treasurer of the Labour Party and northern TUC regional chair. I know that colleagues will miss him as much as I will not only because of the massive contribution that he has made over the years to politics in the north east but simply because he was such a nice person.

## *Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference*

I was selected by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) to lead the UK Parliamentary delegation to the 39th British islands and Mediterranean region conference last month in Gibraltar. I led the conference session discussing renewable energy sources, making the main speech on the subject, as well as making speeches on behalf of the delegation at other functions. But the weather was kind, the company was good and we were very privileged indeed to be entertained on our last night by the band of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment during dinner in the spectacular St Michael's cave.



## *Young People's Standing Committee on e-safety*

The young people involved in Gateshead Youth Council organised a series of standing conferences designed to give decision-makers and young people a chance to come together and discuss relevant issues. I was invited to speak about the issues around internet safety and then to join with one of the working groups of young people to further discuss the matters raised.

I enjoy taking part in these activities - not least because it's refreshing (given the general



demonisation of young people) to find that there are young people who do *actually* care passionately about the welfare of their fellows, seriously want to protect others and are equally committed to playing their part in the community at large. These are our future citizens and - articulate, concerned, imaginative - they give me hope for the future!



## Comment

.The **Crewe and Nantwich by-election**. What can I say? The voters' anger at the rising cost of living and disillusion that led to the defeats in May's local elections and the loss of the London Mayoralty, simply continued in Crewe with the demolition of the previous 7,000 Labour majority as the Tories took their first by-election seat from Labour in 26 years with a 7,860 Tory majority.

Of course, any government would expect a mid-term protest vote, but this was protest on a pretty massive scale and reflects voters' views on rises in petrol, food and council tax as well as the abolition of the 10p tax band - the £2.7bn compensation package announced by the Chancellor came too late to assuage voters' anger.

Turnout was fairly high for a by-election - 58% - and the vote represented a 17% anti-Labour swing which would give Cameron a clear majority in the Commons and, equally clearly, a result like that will be giving Labour colleagues with small majorities serious pause for thought.

My personal view is that it's important not to overreact, especially as most of the UK's problems are as a result of the world-wide economic downturn. I also firmly believe that Gordon Brown is committed to true Labour values and I'm sure we can get through this as long as we don't panic and rush into stupid knee-jerk decisions. But I also believe that it would be political suicide to press ahead with the increase in petrol duty scheduled for September, and I would also like to see the postponement of the 'polluting car' tax that will penalise owners of older cars.

With Budgets the devil is always in the detail and this is another 'detail' the consequences of which were not realised at the time.



## Parliament

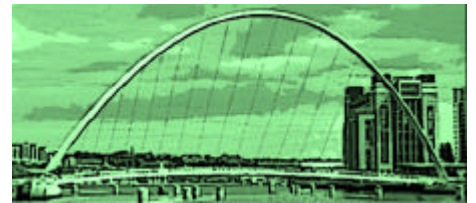
This last month saw the debate on the Second Reading of the **Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill** and its consideration by the whole House, rather than by a separate committee bill. I have a profound respect for those who hold deeply-rooted views or religious convictions opposing the Bill's provisions but I sincerely believe that we owe it to future generations to give our support to stem cell research carried out within a tightly proscribed framework of rules and standards. The **Climate Change Bill** also received its Second Reading as did the **Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Bill**. The Commons also gave consideration of Lords' amendments to the **Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill**, and dealt with the remaining stages of the **Education and Skills Bill** and the **Counter-Terrorism Bill**.

The **Counter-Terrorism Bill** proposes - amongst other measures - the extension of the time that a suspect can be held without charge from 28 to 42 days. The government have gone a long way to build in safeguards against careless use of these provisions and to provide compensation for anyone wrongly caught up.

In its '**National Challenge**', the Government set out plans to transform schools, raise results in English and Maths and tackle underachievement in young people. Good stuff so far, and of course anyone would support plans to unlock the talent and potential of each and every youngster - but 50 days to improve results? And threats to turn 'failing' schools into academies? Plus releasing a deeply flawed out of date list of 'failing' schools which has now labelled over 600 secondary schools as 'failing' without any recognition of the educational disadvantage

often deeply rooted in our unequal society, or any recognition of the improvements brought about by hard and diligent work of teachers, parents and pupils in some of our most deprived communities.

In 'Carers' Week' I was pleased to see the launch of Labour's new **Carers' Strategy**. There will be an expansion in the information and advice services for carers. Skills and training opportunities for carers will also be expanded, and the NHS will trial annual health checks for carers and look at ways for GPs to better support carers. Most importantly, there will be a significant increase in central government funding for short breaks for carers, individually tailored to carers' needs. There was nothing, disappointingly, about the *level* of carers' allowances and I have pursued this again with the Minister.



## Constituency

I have held the usual **advice surgeries** in Gateshead and Newcastle with nothing in particular to report.

I took part in a panel discussion and workshop organised by **Gateshead Youth Council's Young People's Conference** on e-safety, where I was able to join in mutually - I hope - useful and informative discussions of the issues with young people.

I also met with **Gateshead Primary Care Trust** representatives to discuss preventative health initiatives, and joined the Mayor at the **Cancer Research charity 'fun run'** in Saltwell Park (where my wonderful office staff were both participating in support of this worthy cause)