

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party **Parliamentary Report**

David Clelland MP

www.david-clelland.org.uk

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Party Conference

Gordon Brown certainly rose to the occasion at the Labour Party Conference, with a brilliant speech - not least from the inspired introduction by Sarah Brown - in which the Prime Minister regained much of the ground eroded over the last few months with his stance on the crisis facing the global economy. Specific pledges included the promise to put our commitment to ending child poverty by 2020 into legislation; free nursery places for 2 year olds; a commitment to get more than 1 million more families onto broadband by 2012; a new entitlement for primary school

pupils for one-to-one tuition if they are making slow progress in key stage 2 maths or English; and a commitment to end prescription charges for cancer patients.

Millway Centre



I visited Millway Centre in Deckham to meet teaching staff and students attending the unit, and



students as part of their study of democracy and citizenship. Basically a behaviour support

service, the Centre works with pupils who, for various reasons, are experiencing problems with their education - such as challenging behaviour that may have led, or be leading to exclusion - and I was very impressed with the out-standing level of care, support and guidance offered to pupils, ensuring pupils' well-being and personal development.

Brenda and I were delighted to be able to join the family and friends of Freddie Pringle to celebrate Freddie's 80th birthday. Freddie is a good friend and supporter, both to me and to the Party and the function was attended by very many Party members. Freddie is still an active member of Dunston Branch, canvassing and leafleting with the best!

Gateshead Older People Council

I was delighted to be able to speak to those attending the Gateshead Older People's group who were celebrating the contribution made by volunteers to our society. Once again, judging from the many awards given to people who have clearly devoted many years to helping others, it became all too apparent that society simply

could not function without the selfless dedication of volunteers and carers. A point I was able to emphasise to Health Care Minister Phil Hope when he was in my constituency this week.



Freddie Pringle - 80 years young



Comment

The post-war years saw an unparalleled boom in the money markets, a boom that gathered pace over the last 20 years as the free market blossomed, globally and largely unfettered by regulation, bringing with it cheap debt, huge bonuses, ostentatious wealth and the growth of a super-rich class where hedge fund managers, bankers and chief executives take home 75 times more than the average worker.

But now the financial system as we know it is in collapse. Those hedge fund managers and chief executives have led thousands into negative equity, and millions more into fear and anxiety. The global economic crisis has made us all acutely aware of the shortcomings of the 'super capitalism' that has characterised the last 20 years and now we face a whole new ball game.

For a start, we recognise that we cannot solve this crisis alone - even America realises the need for joint action. Secondly, whilst voters on the doorsteps in April were blaming the Labour government for the financial crisis, with banks requiring bail-outs throughout Europe, only an idiot would fail to spot the global dimension. Thirdly, how ironic, for the Eurosceptics, to realise the necessity of acting in concert with Europe - the UK taxpayer alone cannot support a broken international financial system. And fourthly, how brilliantly Gordon Brown has risen to the challenge!

'Events' - that unknown quantity in politics - have given him both a breathing space from what was beginning to look like a downward slide into the opinion poll abyss, and a platform from which to demonstrate that this truly is no time for a novice.

Intellectually and personally, Gordon Brown is visibly and unquestionably a Prime Minister

able to lead his country and save the economy - in comparison with the opinions of the opposition which seem to be of little or no account, and internal party dissension which has evaporated.

But we should not get too complacent. The future is still very uncertain, the housing market will not recover overnight; unemployment is increasing; investments that fund pensions are under threat.

But, Gordon Brown is leading the world on the road to recovery and most commentators acknowledge in the right direction.



Parliament

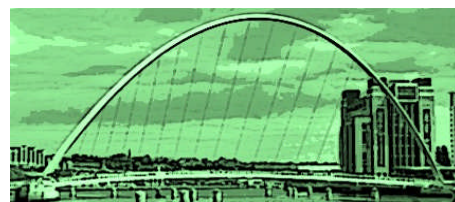
When the world changes, all certainties fly out of the window. Who would have predicted the nationalisation of British banks? Or that Peter Mandelson would be taking a place in Gordon Brown's Cabinet? Nevertheless, there he is heading up Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, a Secretary of State for the third time. Other government changes include Nick Brown as Chief Whip, with Geoff Hoon going to Transport in place of Ruth Kelly, who stepped down for family reasons, and John Hutton replacing Des Browne in Defence.

The House of Commons resumed sitting again only two weeks ago and, obviously, the financial crisis has dominated the political scene. In addition to the almost daily Statements from the Chancellor and the PM as the situation unfolds, the Government have introduced the **Banking Bill** which builds upon and refines the temporary powers to safeguard financial stability that were taken in the Banking (Special Provisions) Act introduced in February of this year. The new Bill gives the Bank of England and the Treasury the powers to deal with banks that get into financial difficulties, improves the financial

services and compensation framework, and gives greater protection to consumers.

Other legislation included the **Dormant Accounts Bill** which allows money lying in dormant accounts to be reinvested in the community, directly helping young people, financial inclusion projects and developing the social investment market.

I have attended the usual PLP and Transport Select Committee meetings and a reception for transport journalists. I also met with representatives from Tesco to discuss the Gateshead town centre redevelopment.



Constituency

Since the last meeting, I have joined family and friends celebrating Fred Pringle's 80th birthday in the Dunston Social Club - and, incidentally, hopefully helping to resolve a problem that the club is experiencing with planning restrictions relating to the smoking ban.

I also welcomed Health Minister Phil Hope to the constituency for a regional stakeholder event reviewing the care and support system. I also visited Ubisoft, a local computer software company very much at the cutting edge of technological development in the industry and now launching an impressive new range of video software.

As outlined on the front page, I also visited the Millway Centre and spoke to students and staff about the centre's aims and ambitions, and I was delighted to be part of the celebration of voluntary work held by the Gateshead Older People's Assembly.