

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Defence Minister visits BAE Systems

I was delighted to be able to welcome Defence Equipment Minister Quentin Davies - in the region to attend a conference with representatives from the defence industry - to the BAE facility on Scotswood Road, and particularly as he chose that day to confirm that BAE Systems have been given the go-ahead for a £300m contract to build a fleet of 60 Terrier vehicles, a tracked armoured earthmoving engineer vehicle which will give the Royal Engineers a powerful and versatile route-clearing and earth moving capacity. (left with MD Jim Imrie, Quentin Davies and Trojan tank)



Two new schools in Dunston -thanks to a Labour government

Kingsmeadow Community Comprehensive School and Dunston Hill Primary School, both newly built, now share a common site. These are excellent state-of-the-art schools and I was glad to be able to attend the formal openings by HRH Duke of Kent and to later join him on a beautiful spring day at the service to dedicate the re-furbished War Memorial in Dunston. (left and below left, at the Memorial)



Labour - Go Fourth



Open University - 40 years old



Who would have thought that Harold Wilson's brain-child would be so successful 40 years on? Still offering flexible tuition support, tailored to the needs of each individual student, the Open University in the North has 70 staff and 550 part-time tutors supporting 5,500 students in the

North of England. It supports a further 5,500 students across western Europe, with a network of 13 country co-ordinators in Europe's major cities. (above with regional director David Knight)

At the Durham rally led by John Prescott, I and constituency party colleagues were surprised but pleased to receive an award recognising the revival of the Women's Section. (CLP Secretary Denise Robson accepts the award from John Prescott)

Gateshead Youth Assembly - Get Gateshead Green

I joined young people from across Gateshead at their conference focused on what actions can we take to make Gateshead more environmentally and globally friendly? As always, I was so impressed by the sense of social responsibility demonstrated by the young people to whom I spoke, and left feeling that truly, our future is safe in their hands!



Comment

Banking is a bit like plumbing - stuff flowing through pipes and mostly you don't think about it but it's almost the end of civilisation when the pipes block up. But in this case, we need a coalition of global plumbers to clear the blockage and get stuff flowing again.

The outcome of the **G20 Summit** will be crucial for the world economy; taken together with the forthcoming Budget it will also be crucial to the re-election chances of the Labour government.

No-one could accuse **Gordon Brown** of inaction. On the contrary, it appears to be acknowledged on the world stage that Gordon Brown, single-handedly, has done more than any other politician to ensure that world leaders met at the London G20 summit in a positive atmosphere, agreed upon the need to work together to construct a new system of financial regulation and greater transparency including tackling the abuse of tax havens.

Talking of stuff flowing through sewers, I struggle to believe that anyone could seriously expect public funds to pay for blue movies. But I would argue that the MPs expenses system *is* transparent - otherwise how would these revelations keep coming to the surface.

Let's face it, the Tories and the media would like nothing better than to make it more difficult for ordinary working people to be elected to represent their communities. I am sure that if there were no 'second home' allowances there would still be plenty of prospective Parliamentary candidates.

The difference would be that we would be back to the era when to be an MP you had to be a person of private means—usually with a 'pad'

in the city and a country home - and who would pay the occasional visit to the constituency to patronise the electors.

The system needs to be brought up to date and made more clear. But in order to preserve our democracy for every citizen it needs to support the principle of participation by all.



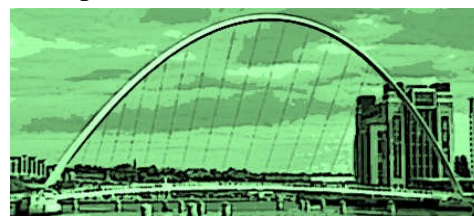
Parliament

I missed the last GC meeting because I stayed in London to support the **Statutory Redundancy Pay (Amendment) Bill**. This was an issue of real importance for me, and will be of major significance for workers in the current economic climate. It seeks to improve the statutory redundancy package for those workers made redundant by increasing the value of redundancy pay by over £200 for every year that an employee has worked in a company. The value of redundancy pay has declined since its introduction in 1965 - by a Labour government - and is now capped at 60% of average earnings meaning that workers are losing out on thousands of pounds at the very time they need it most.

Other legislation included the **Industry and Exports (Financial Support) Bill**, the **Welfare Reform Bill**, and the **Coroners and Justice Bill**. I have received a considerable number of letters concerning the latter Bill, which includes a clause about data-sharing. But the sharing of information will only take place when it is in the public interest to do so and the consent of the parties holding the information must be obtained. The proposals strengthen the role of the Information Commissioner, who will have the power to carry out spot checks on public authorities without their prior consent and to impose deadlines on data controllers for

the provision of information necessary to assess compliance.

I have attended the usual PLP and Northern Group meetings, Transport Select Committee.



Constituency

I have continually raised with ministers my fear that the **Olympic Project** will impact detrimentally on regions like ours and have always been assured that all regions would benefit. So I was very concerned to learn of the possible closure of the state-of-the-art sports medical facility at **Gateshead Stadium**.

The problem is that UK Sport has effectively devolved funding decisions to the major sporting bodies, none of which are in the North East, and which will be concentrating funding in their geographical locations in the interests of *maximising medal wins in 2012*.

Although the immediate threat to the future of the facility at Gateshead stadium is now lifted I remain concerned about the long term, and that aspiring elite sportsmen and women will have to move away from the region in order to access the best facilities.

I have had discussions in the region and a meeting with **Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe** to express my concern about the way substantial sums of public money are now being distributed without any apparent account being taken of the effect this could have on regional and local facilities. He has agreed to look into this and get back to me.

I visited the Copthorne Hotel and had discussions as part of the National Tourism week.