

# Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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## Community Fairs

It is always a delight to attend the local community fairs and this year the fairs were very successful, raising considerable sums of money for charities whilst bringing people together. I'd also like to pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of a handful of people in our communities,

including our local councillors, who devote so much time and energy to such worthy causes without any expectation of reward  
(clockwise at Bensham, Lobley Hill, and Dunston)



## Prime Minister Visits Newcastle



I was delighted to be invited to join the Prime Minister when he visited the region to talk about 'Building Britain's Future'.

At a packed meeting in the Discovery Museum - in the Tyne Bridge Constituency - Gordon Brown fielded questions on a wide range of issues and outlined his vision for the future of our country and our region.

## Sevcon - Developing Electric Vehicles

There are many fantastic aspects to being a Member of Parliament - some not so brilliant but hey! - and having the opportunity to try out the latest in electric vehicular technology is definitely up there with the best. Gateshead's Sevcon on the Team Valley is at the forefront of technological developments that will not only facilitate the production of electric vehicles, including cars and scooters but vehicles with control systems that ensure the batteries give the vehicle a decent driving range at a reasonable cost. This is definitely the future and Sevcon is ahead of the game.



## Comment

The MPs' expenses row has largely abated, despite a brief flare-up when the Commons finally published the heavily-blacked out documents - data protection means that third party names and addresses must be concealed, but it has led to, for instance, blacking out the name and address of the company where we buy our stationary, which is hardly a secret! New rules and regulations governing the conduct of MPs have now also been introduced into the House. Meanwhile, the audit of Members' expenses continues, and we await Sir Christopher Kelly's Report in September.

The Prime Minister also unveiled a compelling pre-election vision of Britain '**Building Britain's Future**' - plus a draft Queen's Speech containing 12 Bills - in a series of regional press interviews. The programme's main plank is to triple the social house building programme by £2bn over the next two years to meet the demand made by more than 4 million people on the waiting list. Noticeable for its absence is postal privatisation and compulsory ID cards.

The nationalisation of the **East Coast Main Line** might have been forced by circumstances but has nevertheless been welcomed. New Home Secretary Alan Johnson also spoke last week about a new emphasis on the causes of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Perhaps there is finally a recognition of the need to rebuild Labour's heartland base after the debacle of the recent local and euro-election results, and a recognition - finally - that the sight of politicians sniping at each other does not inspire confidence amongst the voters



## Parliament

No other **Speaker** has ever been driven from his job as Michael Martin was (although, admittedly, some have been beheaded and/or imprisoned) and no other Speaker has ever been selected by secret ballot. But on an 'agenda for reform, for renewal, revitalisation and the reassertion of the core values of this great institution' Damascene convertee John Bercow was elected last month.

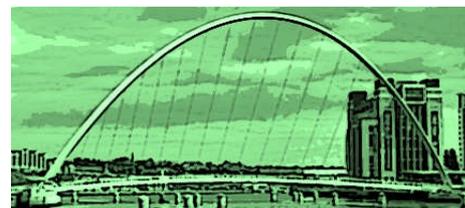
In a break with tradition, the new Speaker wears a business suit under his gown, chose not to wear a wig, told MPs to keep their questions - and Ministers, their answers - short and immediately set up a **Constitutional Reform Committee** to look at ways of strengthening Parliament in its scrutiny of government, how to improve the connection with the public and wrest control away from Party Whips. I have been elected to sit on this committee.

I was pleased to be able to give my own tribute to **Speaker Martin** - a former sheet metal worker who rose to one of the highest offices in the land and a thoroughly decent bloke. This last month, I also spoke in a Debate on **regional railways** as well as in Ministerial Questions on the political situation in the Turks and Caicos Islands, the **Health Bill** and the **A1** North of Newcastle. On the latter, I shall be meeting with the Minister to discuss possible solutions.

Other business of the House has included, of course, the newly-introduced **Parliamentary Standards Bill** - which is being pushed through in what may turn out to be undue haste - the **Marine and Coastal Access Bill** which has returned from discussion in the Lords', and the **Saving Gateway Accounts Bill**

also returned from consideration in the Lords'. The House also passed the **Finance Bill**, despite the threat of a rebellion from backbenchers who felt that those who lost out under the 10p tax band had not been sufficiently compensated. Whilst I believe that the removal of the 10p tax band, in retrospect, was one of our worst decisions, I also believe that the increase in the personal allowance and the additional help to pensioners compensates many households. I abstained on an amendment to bingo duty which I believe could have been handled a lot better.

The Government also launched a consultation on new regulations that will make it unlawful for trade union members to be denied employment through secret **blacklists**, and I'd gladly pass on any examples or comments from members.



## Constituency

In addition to the activities mentioned on the front page, I was delighted to be able to welcome young people from **Carr Hill Primary School** to the Houses of Parliament. The youngsters had been able to travel to London and visit Parliament thanks to a government out-reach scheme that subsidised the cost of travel for schools far away from London.

I also met with Gateshead Council **Leader and Deputy Leader** to discuss issues in the borough, and in addition to joining colleagues at the Blaydon constituency dinner, I was delighted to be able to attend a dinner to commemorate the success of Gateshead Football Club. How nice to have one football team that's on the up.