

# Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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## *Parliament's State Opening*

The Queen set out the government's legislative agenda for the next parliamentary session, focusing on making Britain more secure within our national boundaries, our local neighbourhoods and our own homes on the principle that opportunity and progress can only be built in a safe and secure society. Of prime importance is the Bill to introduce a national identity card, bills to establish the Serious and Organised Crime Agency, a bill to deliver clean and safe neighbourhoods, a National Lottery Bill that allows the public's views to influence the lottery awards, a Rail Bill to improve the management of the railways, better protection for those with disabilities, a crackdown on irresponsible lending through new measures on consumer credit

and the re-introduction of the Gambling Bill and the Mental Capacity Bill (carried over from the last session).

## *Newcastle College Performance Academy*



Above with Newcastle Cllr John O'Shea and Principal Jackie Fisher

There was a time when, if you were serious about a career in the performing arts, then London was the place to be. No longer. This new £21m facility at Newcastle College is as good, if not better, than any in Europe, graded 1 in its latest government inspection.

## *Community Learning Citizenship Course*

Once again, I joined young citizenship students in Gateshead to discuss issues such as the importance of voting and citizen's rights and responsibilities. As always, I was impressed by their lively questioning and, now that the subject has been introduced to them, of their interest and understanding.

## *Lest We Forget*



I joined the Gateshead Civic party at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day in tribute to the brave men and women who paid the ultimate price for their country.





# Parliament

I spoke in the **Debate on Her Majesty's Speech**, saying that I was disappointed by the omission of a **regional assemblies** bill after people decisively rejected the concept in last month's referendum. But the north/south divide remains, the unfairness of dedicated Scottish and Welsh Ministers even after devolution remain, and the centralisation of governance remains. The process of empowering our regional communities must continue - I'd like to see powers given back to local authorities! The other omission was **House of Lords reform** although there is talk of a draft bill proposing an elected second chamber - perhaps we should have another referendum on whether to elect more politicians?

The theme of the bills in the Queen's Speech was that opportunity and progress can only take place in a safe, secure environment, either global or local. In addition to those overleaf, bills included an **Education Bill** to give schools more autonomy, reform school inspections; a **National Lottery Bill** that enables the public to influence lottery awards decisions, a **Mental Capacity Bill** - which was carried over from the last session as was the **Gambling Bill**; a **Road Safety Bill**; and **Euro-pean Union Bill**.

The role of a Labour government should be to help make life better for hard-working people and their families. I welcome the **Child Benefit Bill** that extends support to unwaged 19 year olds in work based training, giving these youngsters equality with those in full time education.

Before the Parliamentary session ended, several pieces of legislation were passed - the **Hunting Bill** being perhaps the most notable but also the **Pensions Bill**, the **Civil Contingencies Bill**, and the **Civil Partnership Bill**.

As well as speaking in the **Debate on the Queens Speech** on the need to equalise resources between the north and south, transport issues - particularly with regard to bus services I also spoke in **transport questions**, pointing out to the Minister that **maximum penalty fares** had not been increased since 1989. The Minister promised to review the limit.

Last month also saw the introduction of the government's **White Paper on Health**. I have been at a loss to understand the criticism of 'the nanny state'. The nanny state is the *good* state - remember the Victorian reactionaries who thought it wasn't the state's business to build sewers despite repeated cholera outbreaks? My socialism says that everyone has the right - the duty and responsibility - to grow to their full potential, and the state can nurture that process not only in education but also in health.

I represent a constituency where more men and women over 60 are more likely to die, and where ill-health is more likely to occur. Our food is still saturated with too much salt, sugar and fat. We still don't take enough exercise. And the poorer people are, the more likely they are to suffer from heart disease, diabetes and obesity. So I think its high time that the government acted to ban smoking in places where food is served, and to ensure that people know exactly what is in the food they

give to their families, and the health risks of obesity.



## Constituency

I have been able to meet with workers from **Swan Hunters**, concerned about future work orders - and it appears that MoD are considering the representations we Northern Members made on their behalf - and from **Unison** about possible changes to their pension provisions. I also addressed the Annual Meeting of the Northern **Showman's Guild**.

As part of their civic awareness course, I spoke to young **Community Learning** students in Gateshead. As on previous occasions, the debate was lively and as informative for them (I hope) as it was for me.

I was also delighted to be able to attend the official opening of **Newcastle College's Performance Academy**. At a time when culture and the arts features so highly on the regional agenda, it is wonderful to now have this facility to nurture, develop and retain creative and artistic people in the north

I was both humbled and proud when **Gateshead Council** conferred the title of **Honorary Alderman** upon me, and my scroll now occupies a prominent position in our home.

*My very best wishes to all  
for forthcoming festivities  
and for the New Year*

