

Tyne Bridge Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Earthquake Appeal

I joined Gateshead's Mayor, Deputy Leader and Dave Anderson MP at a function arranged to raise money for the Pakistan Earthquake Appeal which killed more than 56,000 people, leaving more than 3.5million homeless and in need of food, water and shelter.



Convergys



Convergys' European Director showed me around the refurbished facility in Newcastle that provides highly specialised software customer care to 60 countries and in more than 30 languages to the communications, financial services and technology industries.



Here's to the next 20 years....

I was stunned, and flattered, that so many friends came to Gateshead Civic Centre in a surprise celebration of the anniversary of the 1985 by election. Guests included David Blunkett, other Parliamentary colleagues, Party members and many special guests. I was particularly pleased when Brendan Foster presented me with a painting depicting the Great North Run on the Tyne Bridge.

Netstore Opening

I opened the newly refurbished premises at Netstore, a small British IT company on the Team Valley. The company now employs over 60 people in Gateshead with a £36m revenue forecast for 2006.

ChatAlert Software

I visited a Gateshead computer software company for a demonstration of their revolutionary software designed to prevent paedophiles posing as youngsters and 'grooming' kids as they chat on line. It's the only real-time software available that reviews the text of all chats and alerts parents to the possible danger by text message.



Comment

For a man who must surely be one of the most consummate politicians of our time, a man with remarkable communications skills and an astonishing ability to read situations and people, the defeat on the Government's proposal under the Terrorism legislation to hold terrorist suspects for 90 days marked a seismic shift for the Prime Minister.

It didn't take a genius to anticipate the defeat - indeed, Home Office Ministers were well on the way to brokering a deal - but Tony Blair chose to throw down the gauntlet and stick to his principles rather than compromise.

I told the PM that - based on evidence from the police - I would support the Government's 90 day option for terrorist suspects but I also told him I not prepared to similarly support the Government's White Paper on Education in its current form.

I have no argument against the Government's aims - who could object to the desire to raise standards? And I am not seeking rebellion for rebellion's sake but, through discussion with Ministers, to achieve legislation that I can support.

Besides, our education policies are producing results. A period of stability to let the latest changes bed in would not go amiss. There are more urgent issues facing us—like Energy Policy, Transport policy and Pensions.

When Labour came to power in 1997, Pension Credit and the Winter Fuel allowance immediately lifted 2 million pensioners out of absolute poverty. Now the debate has shifted focus with **Adair Turner's Report** on the future of pensions offering the opportunity to decide how we resolve the looming pensions problem.

The question is not: do we want more spent on pensions for the millions who are woefully under-

provided. Rather it is: how much do we spend on pensions rather than extra healthcare, better schools, help for poorer families with children. It's a straightforward question - do we pay more or save more?

The **Licensing Act** came into force last weekend. Despite media hype, there was apparently no more and no less of the drunken rowdiness that plagues our city centres. The Act will make it easier for local police and residents to seek a review of a licence - including those off-licences - and to close down noisy and disorderly premises.



Parliament

Apart from the **Terrorism Bill**, the House of Commons gave Second Readings to the **Council Tax (New Valuation Lists for England) Bill**, the **Childcare Bill**, the **Equality Bill** - which sets up the new Commission on Equality and Human Rights so people facing discrimination on grounds of age, sexuality or religion have a body to champion their rights for the first time. It also provides for a new duty on the public sector to promote gender equality and bans religious discrimination in the supply of goods and services.

The **Health Bill** also received its Second Reading. Whilst I recognise that many constituents want a total ban on smoking in public places - indeed, my postbag reflects this - these proposals represent a huge step forward for public health and offer the right balance between reducing risk to public health and allowing an element of choice for those who do not want to smoke with a minimal impact on other people. The proposals are in line with our manifesto but there will no doubt be amendments to bring in a total ban as the bill progresses through Parliament.

The House also completed the re-

maining stages of the **Violent Crime Reduction Bill**, the **Road Safety Bill** and the **Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill**. The latter recognises that we need migration to fill the gaps in our labour market and that we must continue to welcome those genuinely fleeing persecution but seeks to eradicate abuse of the asylum system by making the immigration system simpler, clearer and more robust.

I attended the usual **PLP and North East Labour MPs** meetings and attended meetings with the Prime Minister about the **Education White Paper** - my meeting with the Education Secretary is next week - the Home Secretary about the **reform of police structures**, the Leader of the House about **House of Lords' reform**, the DCMS Minister about **Licensing changes** and meetings with **passenger transport and local government representatives**. I co-hosted a reception for **CIU** and other clubs and recruited a local Jazz band to entertain the guests.



Constituency

I was able to welcome the **Deputy Prime Minister** when he opened the new **Tyne Tees** studio in Tyne Bridge constituency in Gateshead



I have also had several media interviews this month - about the Education White Paper and the use of the River Tyne as an economic and leisure resource.