

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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Aviva Grand Prix - Gateshead Stadium

There are so many occasions when I am so proud to call Gateshead my home and the Aviva Grand Prix was just another example of that. I was delighted to be present at the Gateshead International Stadium once again to witness a first class athletics event, with some of the finest athletes in the world competing. The athletes themselves were marvellous, a pleasure to watch; the crowd was fantastic, enthusiastic and passionate, and the organisation second to none - the two hour programme of 23 events overran by just 3 minutes!

Right, a thrilling men's 100 metres; upper left, with paralympic Steve Miller and Cllr Ian Mearns

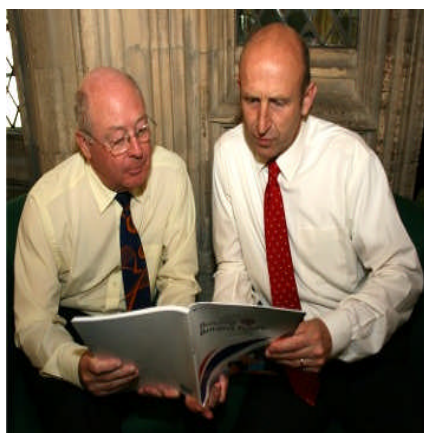


Fairtrade Campaign



I joined Minister Douglas Alexander as he launched a White Paper announcing a significant investment in fair and ethical trading, which will mean that the Fairtrade brand will be able to extend its work to reach food producers in the lowest income countries and conflict zones

Home Help



Carers' Lobby

I arranged a meeting between Gateshead carers and Minister Jonathan Shaw to discuss carers' allowances. (left with the Minister, Elsie Johnson, Laura Dixon and Carol Hope, who also presented a petition to 10 Downing Street on the subject). The Minister recognised the need to continue working on long-term benefit reform of the current care system. Only radical reform will create a care system which is fair, simple and affordable for everyone.

Barney McGill

North East 'Union Learn' manager Barney McGill has retired. I first met Barney in the early 70s when we were both senior shop stewards in the Reyrolle/Parsons engineering group. A lifelong trade unionist, Barney has dedicated his life to the movement so it was with mixed feelings that I attended his retirement 'do' from his latest job as Union Learn regional manager.



Not only has Housing Minister John Healey (left) launched a new national campaign to help struggling homeowners take control of their finances and avoid repossessions through the 'Its Your Home' campaign, which offers practical help and advice through a new website, but he has also given the green light for work to begin on building over 2,000 new council homes, 61 of which will be on 3 sites in Gateshead, primarily for the elderly and those with a disability.

Comment

As usual, in September, I am trying to get to as many ward party meetings as I can and I've therefore re-read GC reports for the last year. Last September, I predicted that we would be seeing the first signs of the economic recovery this autumn. I'm glad to say that this appears to be the case - OECD reports that it is revising up its forecast for world growth for this year and next; France, Germany and Japan have all declared their recession officially over and reports this week suggest that the jobs market is showing signs of recovery, particularly in the North East thanks to significant government investment to create 'green' jobs.

For my money, the green shoots of economic recovery we are now seeing are down to Gordon Brown and his economic policies as Chancellor and then Prime Minister. We're not out of the woods yet - Britain faces a £175 billion public spending deficit by the end 2010 - but Gordon Brown's economic management and spending priorities mean that the UK has largely been cushioned from the very worst effects of the global downturn.

If we are not yet in general election mode we certainly will be after the Party conferences. And the Election will be a choice between Labour's carefully structured management of the economy - with core public services protected - or cuts-happy Cameron's evasion of actual policy detail other than abolishing the subsidy on a pint of lager in the House of Commons, which makes a good headline more than it makes a difference. Frankly, I feel optimistic about the result - I do not think people will vote for the Tories, knowing the consequence will be cuts in public services. However, it is our job to get Labour's message across and point out to people just what they risk losing if their were to be a change of government.

The first group of young people to have been entirely educated under a Labour government picked up their GCSE results last month. The overall A* - C rate has increased once again; there have been significant increases in entries for the three sciences; results in modern languages are up too and I was also delighted to see that Gateshead's results are the best ever, with more than 8 in every 10 pupils now leaving school with five or more top grades. Unlike the cynical press I congratulate our young people on their hard work and excellent results.

None of this happened by accident. It's a direct result of the investment in our schools and young people from a Labour government and a Labour council, both absolutely committed to an education system in which every child can succeed and can fulfil their potential.

By contrast, the Tories rubbish our plans to raise the education and training age to 18; oppose vocational qualifications and tell parents who want better schools for their children that they should set them up themselves!



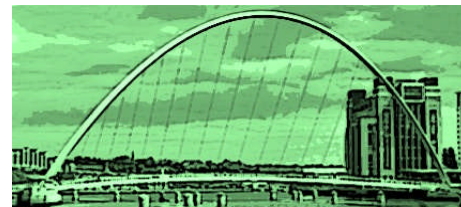
Parliament

The House of Commons rose for the summer shortly after my last report. But before the recess, the House debated the **Political Parties and Elections Bill** which introduces greater transparency on the funding of political parties, including the issue of tax exile donors. Multimillionaires and others who want to give money to a political party will have to declare that they are a permissible donor and give a reference about their tax status. The bill also introduces new rules about election expenses that come into force on 1 January 2010.

The **Borders, Citizenship and**

Immigration Bill was read for the Third time and the **Child Poverty Bill** received its Second Reading.

Statements which I know will be of particular interest to members include the launch of the Green paper 'Shaping the Future of Care Together'. A country is defined by how it cares for the vulnerable and, in my view, we can do much better. We need a care system that we can rely on, which does not penalise the prudent and ends the financial lottery of people facing hardship because, for instance, they happen to suffer from dementia. So the government has put forward three options for consultation - a partnership model in which both state and the individual share responsibility; a voluntary insurance model and thirdly, a comprehensive model in which everyone pays into a state scheme and the subsequent costs of care are then met fully by the state



Constituency

I have met with business representatives from the northern CBI, and attended a dinner in honour of trade union colleague Barney McGill. I have also met with representatives from Spenhill, the company developing the Gateshead town centre on Tesco's behalf - I took the opportunity to express my concern about the length of time the redevelopment was taking but I was assured that the delay was simply because all those concerned want to get the very best possible result for Gateshead.

I have also been able to attend some local ward party meetings - as always, useful occasions for an exchange of views which I will be able to take back to the leadership next month.