

Gateshead Constituency Labour Party Parliamentary Report

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This will be my last Parliamentary Report. It has been an honour, and a great privilege, to have served the people of Tyne Bridge constituency for almost 25 years and, in many ways, I am saddened that I will not now have the opportunity to represent the first Gateshead constituency since 1950 as its MP. But everything has to come to an end sometime and I know that our newly selected candidate Ian Mearns will do a good job and I support him and wish him well.



The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war, the release of Nelson Mandela and end of apartheid, the advent of the world wide web and climate change, wars in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan, an economic boom as well as a global recession... There have been many important events and changes since I was first elected Member of Parliament for Tyne Bridge. Locally, the physical landscape has changed dramatically over 25 years – scrap yards dominated the site now graced by Sage, the Millennium Bridge, Baltic, the fabulous new Gateshead College further behind and the Centre for Life and Bioscience development across the Bridge. The development of Gateshead town centre remains a work in progress but, as the outline proposals (*right*) showed, I'm sure it will be worth waiting for.



Fund Raising Abseil off the Tyne Bridge

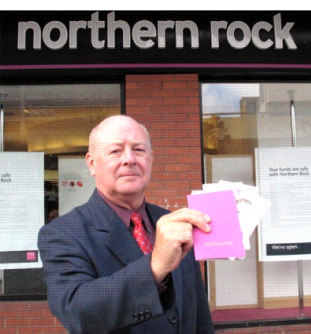
There have been big changes too in our economic infrastructure. The region, in 1986, was still reeling from the impact of Thatcher's economic policies, the miner's strike had just ended and shipbuilding was in decline, forcing our economy to diversify. Despite the headlines, the UK is still the 6th largest exporter and manufacturing survives albeit in a different format.



Although, for example, I feared the worst when I stood on the picket line with Spartan Redheugh steel workers in 1992, I was later able to congratulate the company on winning the Queen's Award to industry for its exports (*right*).



Vickers, now BAE Systems, is not the giant of 50 years ago but I have worked hard to lobby on behalf of the company and workforce (*left with Minister Quentin Davies*). The Federation Brewery has had troubled times too and, despite a temporary respite when S&N took over, recent policy changes look like closing the facility. (*right, the opening of the new bottling plant*) And the crisis in the banking industry had a particular relevance in our region, with the collapse of Northern Rock and subsequent government rescue package (*below left supporting Gateshead branch of Northern Rock*).



I believe that the region's economic future is robust, despite the impact of the global recession. Yes, there is much to do, like the need to improve our transport infrastructure, but there are also many thriving companies - Sevcon, for instance, developing cutting-edge electric vehicle technology and Omega Plastics (*right*) manufacturing a revolutionary invention that is a unique way of purifying water. Both companies in Gateshead. Gloomy headlines often cloud the facts, there are 187,000 more jobs in the region than in 1997.



However, there are challenging times ahead and a Labour election victory is vital for our region and our country.



But the biggest political event was the election of a Labour Government in 1997, and I was extremely proud to serve as a Minister in the Whips Office for the first Labour Government for 18 years, bringing in legislation that has shaped the social fabric of our region and the UK. (left, Labour MPs in the Commons on the 100th anniversary of the creation of the PLP)

Not everything went quite according to plan - although Wales and Scotland got devolved governance, the Northern region's 'Yes' campaign for regional government hit the buffers despite our best efforts (right). But I have never ceased to be proud to be part of a government determined to pump money into ending child poverty and improving every child's opportunities in life. The Sure Start programme has been fantastic (left at the Elgin centre) and I have enjoyed many visits to primary and secondary schools, all showing the results of incredible sustained investment in buildings, resources and staff (below right at St Josephs, Oakfield and at Kingsmeadow with visiting Mr Speaker)



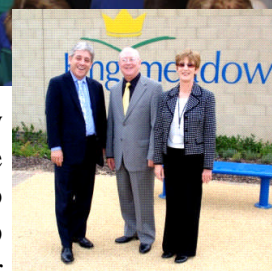
There has been tremendous investment in young people - I have watched Gateshead College go from strength to strength, welcoming students to the Houses of Parliament on a regular basis. (below left). I've been particularly conscious of the transport costs faced by young people and I've strongly supported efforts to introduce student travel plans across the region (below right). And investment hasn't been confined to formal education - young people attending the Dunston Drop In Centre (below) as well as Gateshead Council's older workers (far right) have also benefited from the Government's determination to offer educational opportunities to all.



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I have worked with Gateshead Carers' Association campaigning on Carers' Allowance, trying to improve the lot of working carers. I have led delegations to Downing Street (left) and presented petitions to Parliament which have highlighted the issues and, whilst the rules for the Working Carers' Allowance have not yet changed, the Allowance has been increased.



But I don't have to remind you about the help that government has given to older people too - the Winter Fuel Allowance and Pension Credit for example. I've always strongly supported the government-funded energy scheme and was pleased to visit one Saltwell resident (left) who'd been given a new boiler and radiators under the scheme. She said that the Labour government had transformed her life - she was better off and warmer than she'd ever been, and that seems to me to be a pretty decent testimony on which to bow out. So, to quote Tony Blair on his last day as Prime Minister - **That's it - the end**