

Report from Jeremy Corbyn MP

October-November 2009

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The Queen's Speech

The Queen's Speech was short, predictable and heavily trailed by the media. The positive aspects are the support for public services, the climate change convention in Copenhagen, and regulation of the financial services.

There are also plans for legislation in respect of personal care for the elderly, educational standards, anti-social behaviour and access to digital broadcasting. I was pleased that the Government recognised the need to legislate for equality and close the gap between the rich and poor in our society, and at last give equal treatment to agency workers.

The Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan sections of her speech were vague, but at least allows scope for the Government's apparent intention of supporting a conference in Britain in January to plan for the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Housing

Housing problems are enormous in inner-city areas, and no more so than our own; with huge waiting and transfer lists in Islington.

I am pleased at all the improvement works that have happened on estates through the Decent Homes Standards. There is however a problem of the bills that have been foisted upon leaseholders as a result of this, many of which are challenged.

Over the last year the Government has put a lot of money through the Homes and Communities Agency into council house building, and Islington has accessed a lot of this money which has provided a lot of new homes in infill sites. We need this programme to be bigger and longer lasting and not just an emergency measure to fill employment problems during the economic crisis.

In other local good news, £4.3million has been made available by the Government to Homes for Islington for making cavity wall insulation available to 6700 homes, which means that many people with high heating bills will get good quality insulation in their homes, ensuring warmth in winter and reduced energy bills.

Afghanistan

Opinion polls taken for Remembrance Sunday show that nearly two thirds of those questioned do not support the war and want the British troops home. Perhaps more tellingly, about half do not understand what the war is for.

Indeed the more questions that are put to successive defence ministers on the purpose of troop deployment, the more vague are the answers.

This is now the ninth year that British troops have been in Afghanistan, longer than the two world wars, and longer than any other conflict of the twentieth century except Northern Ireland. The best estimate from any of the Military is that on current strategy, they could leave in five years; some talk of thirty years.

Clearly this whole strategy is a failure; thousands of wholly innocent Afghan people have died, drug production is at record levels, the warlords are in the government buildings, and support for various groups of Taliban fighters is rapidly rising. The Western forces rely largely on air support to move around as the roads are too dangerous.

Karzai's proclaimed re-election is a travesty of any democratic process, and the Western public are supposed to believe that there are successes in nation building.

The political problems of withdrawal are a smokescreen for the real purposes of being there.

The Bush doctrine of the Project for a New American Century used the Afghan military effort of 2001 to not only invade that country, but also to create a ring of bases and military capability all over central Asia; issues of oil pipelines to the sea and the huge untapped mineral potential of the country were, and remain, major considerations. The Afghan War is a failed strategy where lives are being lost to prop-up a corrupt political system and a president without a democratic legitimacy; at least there serious discussions about a withdrawal strategy which should be hastened and we should look to a new foreign affairs strategy which does not involve invasion, occupation and wars.

Transport

The ongoing transport campaigns continue. With the RMT Parliamentary Group I have been keeping issues such as fair pay for cleaners on our tube, rail and Eurostar networks on the political agenda.

I am also very disappointed by the refusal of Transport for London to fund the lift access to the Underground platforms at Finsbury Park, which means that accessibility to the station for the entire community is impossible. It is high time there was proper joined-up thinking and planning by all our public transport undertakings. Finsbury Park is a very busy, very overcrowded, and totally inadequate station for the needs of local people; those who inter-change from mainline to tube and those who come by bus.

It now seems that even the 2013 plan for the mainline train access is in jeopardy and I am very annoyed about this. I have lobbied the Department for Transport, Network Rail and the Mayor of London on this repeatedly, and will continue to do so. It seems the real problem is the Mayor's decision to withdraw Finsbury Park from the step-free access programme. In the twenty first century everyone should be able to access all our public transport. For how much longer will wheelchair users be denied access through Finsbury Park station and those with buggies or

heavy luggage having to struggle and rely on the kindness of strangers simply to board a train?

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I reproduce below some of the more significant things I have been involved in since October, as well as some of my parliamentary interventions.

PALESTINE: I was invited to speak at the **Oxford Union** on 22nd October, where I spoke in favour of the motion “This house trusts politicians more than journalists”. Other members of the debate speaking in favour included Lord Falconer and Bob Marshall-Andrews QC MP, and we won. From 1st - 3rd November I traveled with the **Palestine Return Centre to Syria**. It was a cross-party trip which included Lord Sheikh (Conservative), Baroness Jenny Tonge (Liberal Democrat) and Pat Green. We had a very useful meeting with President Assad and The United Nations Refugee Commissioner in Syria and visited a number of Palestinian refugee camps which I wrote a description for the Morning Star. Later in November (11th) the **Palestine Solidarity Campaign** held a fundraising dinner where I was a guest speaker. The event was a great success and I am proud to support the valuable work the campaign does supporting Palestinians and seeking a just peace.

ANTI NUCLEAR/WAR: 24th October was the day of the **national demonstration** organised by the Stop the War Coalition (STW) and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) calling for troops to be withdrawn from **Afghanistan** and I addressed the demonstration in Trafalgar Square. In the following month of November (15th) I spoke at some length in the Arms Export Control Debate quoting a submission by **Campaign Against the Arms Trade** (CAAT) which is based in Finsbury Park – see the attachments. Also in November (5th) the **Parliamentary CND** group met and discussed the way forward for the campaigns. The debate that was planned to take part later in the day was also discussed and later that day I spoke in it: an **adjournment debate on 'Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty'**. I addressed issues and prospects for a 2010 nuclear non-proliferation treaty review conference and attach my contribution later in this report. On 8th November I took part in a debate for the **BBC World Service on Afghanistan**, with Robert Fox (Defence Correspondent Evening Standard) and Professor Fair (Georgetown University, Washington).

LATIN AMERICA: On 28th October I chaired the book launch of Grace Livinstone's latest publication “America's Backyard” in the House of Commons. On 3rd November I met with other MPs and **Tita Radilla** who is an iconic Mexican leader of the human rights campaigners in Mexico Oaxcha and we had a very good discussion on the impunity of the armed forces in Mexico. The following day there was a picket to reinstate President Zelaya of **Honduras** outside the US Embassy and I joined the protestors and spoke. On the 15th November **Islington Venezuela Solidarity Campaign** and **Islington Cuba Solidarity Campaign** invited me to speak at their event locally which was a pleasant afternoon. On 18th November I participated in the launch of a new Latin America Bureau (LAB) multi media website.

Other OCTOBER events

22nd: Following the BBC's decision to allow the British National Party to appear on Question Time, I joined anti-fascist supporters and **Unite Against Fascism** in the demonstration outside the BBC.

23rd: Following the decision taken by postal workers in the **Communications Workers' Union to strike**, I stood in solidarity with some local postal workers at the 'N7 picket'.

I met with Islington **Councillor James Murray** to discuss local issues.

There was a **Kiver Road** incident meeting at the Town Hall which I attended.

I met with a representative from **Finsbury Park Traders** regarding the trading situation locally.

24th: Children who took part in the summer reading challenge at **Mildmay Library** were rewarded with certificates which I presented to them at the Library.

Diwali Celebrations at Hanley Crouch took place and I joined the community there.

26th October: I met with Theo Haralambous of the **Whittington Park Community Centre**.

GayWise LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) Arts Festival held a function in Parliament which I attended in support them.

The campaign for **step-free access at Finsbury Park** station continues and I leafleted commuters and collected signatures on the petition with **Disability Action in Islington**, as well as local campaigners at the station.

27th: I attended **UNISON Parliamentary Group** where we discussed local government pensions, among other things.

At the meeting of the Parliamentary **Iran** Group we discussed diplomatic relations with Iran and the possibility of developing parliamentary contacts between British and Iranian parliamentarians.

Islington Youth Theatre had a 24 hour fundraising event along with other groups who had to write a play and perform it in the evening. Islington Council gave Islington Youth Theatre £20,000.

28th: I attended the **RMT Parliamentary Group** where we discussed the funding of London Underground, Transport for London and Tyne and Wear Metro, as well as the situation of cleaners working for rail companies and tube lines.

The new **High Commissioner for Bangladesh**, Dr M Sayeedur Rahman Khan, had a meeting with MPs and we discussed Bangladeshi matters.

I spoke in the **Sri Lanka debate** (please see attachments to this report for more details on this).

There was a conference on 'Iran on the footsteps of Israel: What is next - Weapons of Mass Destruction Race or Non-proliferation?' at which I spoke.

29th: **iBUG's World Mental Health Day** event took place and I was happy to be supporting the work they do.

I was invited to speak at the **Cambridge Union** in favour of the motion "This House believes that Israel demands too much and gives too little in the peace process". I spoke with Lord Hannay and our arguments won when it went to the vote.

30th: I attended the funeral of **Redmond O'Neill** who deserves a lot of credit for the achievements of Ken Livingstone's terms as mayor and for helping drive through projects like the congestion charge, and for championing the Irish community.

I visited and met with Pastor Olaju's congregation for a borough-wide service on Gifford Street.

Islington North Constituency Labour Party **Black Socialist Society** celebrated their 25th birthday party and I was happy to participate.

Other NOVEMBER events

The **Inter-Parliamentary Union** Executive held the Annual General Meeting (AGM) which I attended and I was returned unopposed to sit on the executive for another year.

Liberation Central Council met, as usual.

4th: I met with a group of constituents on a lobby of parliament on behalf of **women asylum seekers** who often have no recourse to public funds so can end up homeless.

I spoke to **UCL Labour Students** about the state of the Labour Party and the situation in the Middle East.

6th: As part of a project run at **Duncombe Primary School** there was a visit of pupils to Parliament where they gave presentations on the issue of children being left home alone.

7th: I went out and about in **Junction** Ward to meet people there.

The **RMT Union** had a Conference where we discussed political alternatives.

South East Region Trades Union Congress (**SERTUC**) held their **Annual Conference** and invited me to say some rousing words in closure.

Liberation's International Evening was a great success.

8th: I attended the **Remembrance Sunday** multi-faith ceremony at Islington Green which was led by Father Jim Kennedy. I went onto the North Islington war memorial at Manor Gardens later where we held a short wreath laying ceremony with Councillor Barbara Sidnall, the Mayor of Islington and others. I gave an address about the need for peace and not war.

10th: I attended an important meeting with the **UK Ambassador to Morocco** concerning possible direct talks between the Moroccan Government and the Polisario about the issue of Western Sahara.

I chaired a roundtable with the International **Dalit Solidarity Network** and **One World Action** and we heard speeches from Dalit women from India and Nepal. We discussed legalities in India and the impact of a new constitution in Nepal.

Bolivia's One World Action met with me and several Bolivian environmental campaigners.

Students from **London Metropolitan University** came to visit me to film me as part of their project on the future for Islington.

Caxton House AGM took place where I spoke.

11th: I was proud to host the **National Union of Students'** Lobby of Parliament where students lobbied their MPs on the Fees Review which was announced at the beginning of the week which excludes students and educational professionals from the review. I am committed to opposing any rises in students' fees and stand by my vote in 2003 where I voted against top-up-fees being introduced.

Finsbury Park Homeless Project held their AGM where I spoke about the importance to build more housing in our community, including council housing.

13th: In addition to my regular advice surgeries I hosted a surgery at **North London Central Mosque**.

The launch of the **London Somali Festival** took place and I attended.

14th: The **Labour Representation Committee's** conference was a great success and I spoke to the gathering about international matters to the gathering.

15th: I met residents and went 'out and about' in **Highbury East** ward.

I attended a lunch at the **Andover Community Centre**

17th: I met with Leonie Johnson who is active on the **Mildmay Fields Project** which is to build a concrete cover over the London Overground (North London Line) between Newington Green Road and Mildmay Park, creating an open space with allotments and sports facilities. They are holding an open day on 2nd December at King Henry's Walk Gardens which I will be attending.

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Photo: Jeremy pledging to vote against any increase in student fees at the National Union of Students' lobby of Parliament with Wes Streeting, NUS President.

