



Glenda Jackson MP
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Housing and Regeneration Bill

Not so much a ‘good day for burying bad news’, as seven bad days which buried really good news.

The Housing and Regeneration Bill is one such example. This Bill will be instrumental in delivering the Government’s programme of three million new homes by 2020, building not just affordable homes to buy, but also affordable homes to rent, and not just one or two bed flats, needed though they be, but homes big enough to accommodate growing families or at the other end of the age scale, frail and elderly relatives.

These proposals link our thinking on ‘Every Child Matters’, and the fact that our population is living longer. Most of us want to end our day at home, with those who love us most around us, so when the Government’s says it is listening to the people, it is clear they not only listen, but hear.

Further good news was also announced in the statement on Welfare and Skills, as part of the Government’s high-skills agenda.

As the Prime Minister said, ‘in the old days, lack of jobs demanded priority action. In the new world it is lack of skills’. However, the old days aren’t that far behind us. I can remember 3 million unemployed, many being dumped onto incapacity benefit, as the then Conservative Government massaged the unemployment figures.

Since 1997, there have been dramatic changes - 2.8 million more in work, and 1 million fewer on unemployment benefits. However, the demands of an increasingly competitive world, means our future and our children’s future is dependent, not only tackling and defeating climate change, but also in making ours one of the best educated and most highly skilled nations in the world.

As part of the Government’s proposals, help will be given not only to those who lack basic skills, but to those who want to update and expand the skills they already have; help for lone parents, for those on incapacity benefit, to not only rejoin the world of work, but the wider world from which due to lack of confidence they feel excluded.

There will be more apprenticeships, partnerships with employers committed to high quality in-house training, and more money for the “Train to Gain scheme”, in which fifty thousand employers are already participating. Now, there will be opportunities for the small and medium sized businesses to participate, too, to discover how their efficiency and profitability can be increased by the growth of skills.

The official opposition, of course, opposed the Bill on housing and attempted to rubbish the high-skills agenda, and have been drowning the stage in crocodile tears over the Labour Party’s funding furore. The Party and Government, however, are furious that something so unacceptable and inexcusable, so unlawful should have happened.

Police investigations are underway, as are the two internal Party inquiries, and the Prime Minister has pledged his co-operation and support to the police for ‘the fullest possible investigation’. He has asked all Labour Party members to follow suit.

As he said, what has happened is ‘unacceptable’, and it is in the public interest that any question of impropriety is answered. No one who is concerned with our democracy, or who thinks that politics should be transparent and open will argue with that.