

CHANCELLOR RECEIVES DEGREE ALONGSIDE Honours for pair trying to wipe out poverty

By AMY HUNT
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POLITICAL hot topics were debated on Tyneside as Chancellor Gordon Brown and campaigner Sir Bob Geldof paid a visit to the region.

The pair were invited to receive honorary degrees from Newcastle University for their work to wipe out poverty in developing countries.

And Mr Brown, seen as Prime Minister-in-waiting, officially launched Newcastle College's Trade Union Education Centre.

Mr Brown and Sir Bob took the opportunity to speak about issues close to their hearts, with the Irish former pop star taking part in a debate on world poverty issues with fellow debt relief campaigners and honorary graduates. They were political economist Susan George, former President of Tanzania Benjamin William Mkapa and Dr David Golding, development co-ordinator of Make Poverty History North East.

And the Chancellor addressed delegates at the College's Rye Hill Campus, saying he believes the North East is leading the way in forging an economy to rival huge powers like China.

"This facility has grown so much in such a short space of time," he said.

"Just a few years ago, this service came from one room and was used by a handful of people.



CALL FOR ACTION: Bob Geldof at the Live 8 show

"From that, we now have this fantastic centre that more than 2,500 people use and it offers more than 1,000 courses.

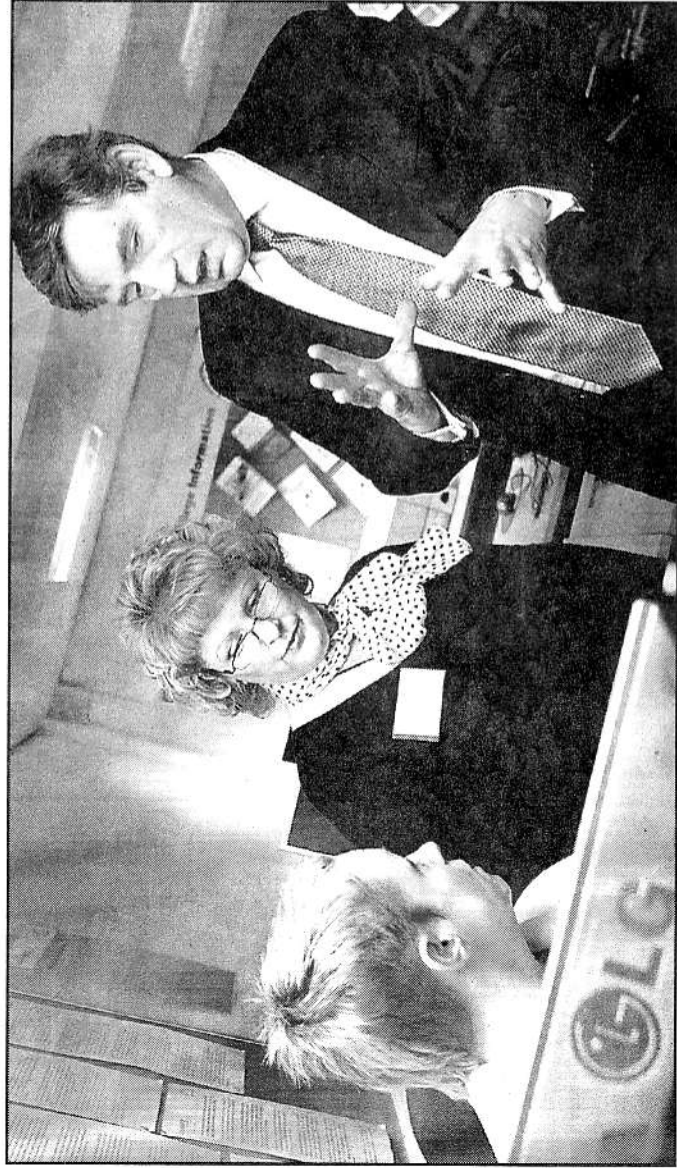
"I know the difference trade union learning can make.

"At award presentations, I've seen the enthusiasm of learners who've finally achieved a skill that the old school system didn't give them credit for.

"I've seen the delight from the mums who've won their first award, after their school could not provide for them."

He added: "We need to be looking at the work

CAMPAIGNERS INCLUDING SIR BOB GEIDOF



VISIT: Gordon Brown opens the Trade Union Education Centre at Newcastle College

Making the world listen

THE Make Poverty History campaign was launched as Britain took on the presidency of the G8 in 2005, with the hope of catapulting debt relief to the top of the political agenda. The campaign set out to raise public awareness of Third World debt and to put pressure on governments to take action to wipe this out.

It was a coalition of more than 400 charities, unions and faith groups ranging from Oxfam and Comic Relief to the Transport and General Workers Union.

Scores of famous faces promoted the campaign by wearing white wristbands bearing the Make Poverty History slogan, and a series of street protests and pop concerts around the world kept the issue in the news.

Sir Bob Geidof was instrumental in promoting the campaign and in keeping the pressure on politicians to stick to promises made at the G8 summit held in Gleneagles, Scotland.

going on in other countries to make sure we are still moving forward.

"Countries like China have a highly-skilled workforce, as well as four million graduates a year compared to 400,000 here.

"Centres like this one help to provide training for skills and everyone should be given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

"The North East has the highest number of trade union members in the country and I think we should be

so proud of what is being achieved in this region."

Afterwards Mr Brown paid a visit to The Sage Gateshead, where he picked up his doctor of civil law from Newcastle University's chancellor, Lord Chris Patten, for his efforts in improving aid, trade and debt relief in the world's poorest countries.

Newcastle University took the unusual step of awarding an honorary degree to a serving politician because of the chancellor's

contribution to eliminating third world debt.

Sir Bob and Mr Brown, who have worked together to find a solution to poverty in developing countries, met briefly with the other graduates before the ceremony.

And Sir Bob paid tribute to the work the Chancellor and Prime Minister have done on the issue.

He said: "Without question Brown and Blair have completely altered the possibility of addressing this issue.

"They feel as

strongly about this as I do and they did force the world to change things at Gleneagles, because of us making a fuss.

"There are millions of people alive today because of what happened."

He also urged people in the North East to play their part in keeping pressure on governments to solve the problem of third world debt.

He said: "It seems absurd to me that people should have nothing in a world of surplus, that is something which still irritates me.

"Governments want to do nothing. It's our job to make them do something.

"I would urge you today to write to Gordon Brown and insist."

After the ceremony Mr Brown was whisked away to return to London, while the other graduates took part in a debate on world poverty, taking questions from the audience.



The big dilemma

SIR Bob Geldof has long been an advocate for tackling world poverty.

It is more than 20 years since he galvanised entertainers from across the world to take part in Live Aid.

His work raised awareness of the issue as well as huge amounts of money to help the people of Africa, and Ethiopia in particular. But despite his efforts we go into 2007 with poverty still a crippling problem.

Newcastle University yesterday bestowed an honorary degree on the pop legend. Alongside him was Chancellor and Prime Minister-in-waiting Gordon Brown, who was similarly honoured for his work in trying to help ease the financial crisis in Africa.

The event was marked with an intellectual debate on "making poverty history".

And there is the problem; despite high-profile fundraising, governments working together to ease the debt burdens facing the poorest countries and a whole series of other measures, huge swathes of people still live in poverty.

Too many regimes live in luxurious splendour while the people they govern starve.

Eliminating developing world debt is only part of the solution. There needs to be a political will to help these countries rebuild from within and realise their full economic potential to give their people a better life in the long-term.

Only by continually highlighting the issue and putting pressure on the people who can make a difference – that is those in government – can the issue be truly tackled.

As Sir Bob Geldof says, it is absurd in a world of surplus that some people have nothing and through no fault of their own.

If yesterday's event achieved nothing other than keeping world poverty at the forefront of our minds then it was a worthwhile exercise.