

Bethan Jenkins Column

This week I was deeply disappointed that the UK Government's target of abolishing child poverty by 2020 has suffered a severe set-back.

Figures released by the Department for Work and Pensions, reveal child poverty levels have risen for a second successive year – there are now an additional 100,000 children living in poverty, taking the total to 3.9million for the UK .

The figures are a huge blow to the efforts being made to eradicate child poverty in Wales . The most vulnerable in our society are paying the price for the UK Government's missed opportunities in several Budgets. There is a moral obligation on Whitehall to come up with the necessary resources to reverse this damaging trend.

I have called on the Assembly's Counsel General to set aside time at the Assembly to debate the issue as a matter of urgency, and has also called on Social Justice Minister Brian Gibbons to lobby the Westminster Government for the Assembly to have an enhanced say on Welfare policy.

Other countries across Europe continue to out-perform the UK in child poverty eradication. I fully support calls made by child poverty charities for an additional £3billion from the Treasury to be targeted at children in poverty using the welfare systems. If London continues to show impotence in this area then the Assembly will have an obligation to seek powers over aspects of the welfare system to deliver for our young people.

I am also extremely concerned at the UK Government's sustained attack on our civil liberties. Recently, the UK Government won a vote in the House of Commons to allow the detention of individuals, without charge, for 42 days.

I am very disappointed that local Labour MPs voted for the Government's controversial anti-terror laws.

Of the 36 Labour MPs who rebelled against the Government in the vote at the House of Commons, only three were Welsh Labour MPs.

The vote at the Commons was politics at its worst – Gordon Brown was forced to push through this latest assault on our civil liberties by bargaining. Local Labour MP, many who have campaigned for civil liberties in the past, propped up Gordon Brown's crumbling Government.

The vote was 315 for the Government and 306 for the opposition with widespread accusations that the nine votes of Democratic Unionist Party MPs were secured in exchange for particular policies by the Prime Minister in a desperate attempt to force the bill through.

This is everything but a victory for the Prime Minister. Without the last-gasp help of DUP MPs there were more than enough Labour rebels to quash this

immoral bill. It is a shame that of the 39 Welsh Labour MPs only three stood up for the civil rights of our citizens. Only for so long will Gordon Brown be able to bargain his way through Parliamentary votes – many will question whether this Government will last another forty-two days