

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CLARE SHORT

Labour MP for Birmingham Ladywood, 1983-2010

What are you up to?

I am a chair of a partnership of all sorts of organisations, based in Brussels, on a UN platform about slums and urbanisation, called the Cities Alliance. And I chair the UK arm of the Welfare Association which focuses on Palestinian refugees and the camps in Lebanon. I am trustee of an organisation in Birmingham which tries to help destitute asylum seekers in the West Midlands. And I do the odd lecture and talk when people ask me.

How does it compare to being an MP?

Well you can't be an MP forever. I have more time to choose and shape my life rather than make one choice that then takes everything from you – by being an MP all your time is taken. Whereas now I am more in charge of what I do with myself.

How did you react to life after standing down?

My leaving was a journey, it wasn't just a sudden moment. My estrangement with the Labour party – over Iraq, and the failure of the party to do anything about all the dishonesty and what had been done – was going on for some time. So for me it wasn't some kind of big shock like it probably is for a lot of other people who are going full tilt in their MP job and then



they leave and they feel bereft. I knew I was going there, so I just carried on.

What do you miss about Parliament?

People ask me a lot if I miss it, and I say I don't, and that's honest. But reflecting on your question, I suppose I miss some of the drama and the pure adrenaline of it – adrenaline is a wonderful drug. And I miss the constituents – both the human affection, or indeed irritation, you feel for people – and the way that anchors you in to what's happening to people and moves you and solidifies you in knowing what's going on in the country. I miss that direct contact with people who've got needs, and demands, and being able to do something for them and with them.

What don't you miss about Parliament?

The biggest 'I don't miss' is the sort of nasty end of the media. *The Sun* really went for me big time, over a long period, and just

not having to put up with that kind of pure, distorting nastiness – I don't miss that at all. It's unpleasant – they are out there hunting you, but you either give in or get on with it. I had busloads of Page 3 girls parked outside my house. I didn't feel unsafe but obviously the plan was to get some sort of humiliating photograph of me. But I don't think I ever felt vulnerable to attack.

Do you keep in touch with politicians?

Not really because of course I walked away from my party. There are one or two people I occasionally see, but really I've left it all, including one or two people I was close to, behind me. Which is a bit sad but it's the consequence of the decisions I took which

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I felt I had to take. That's life. Also, where one spends so much time in that building – and especially in the days before restrictions on hours – and therefore you spend a lot of time with other politicians, when you go home they are not there. You almost do have these two lives: intensely in the House of Commons in the party structures, and then you've got your mum, your brothers and sisters and your friends, and that's a different kind of life. The political contacts part of my life, I walked away from.

Do you still follow politics closely?

Not the trivia, the gossip about other people, but I do like following where we are going on Brexit and the mess of Afghanistan and Syria and indeed the problems of inequality, house prices and the rest. So I'm still politically engaged, that's the kind of mind I have, but it's the bigger picture rather than day-to-day trivia that engages me. 🍷

