



MARCH 2023 NEWSLETTER



March saw the Chancellor deliver his **Spring Budget**. As usual with this Tory Government, the budget was not worth waiting for.

We needed a transformative Budget designed to lift incomes and living standards, deliver fair funding to level up our poorer regions and nations and build an economy fit for future generations.

Instead, what we got was a speech by a multi-millionaire Chancellor, on behalf of a multi-millionaire Prime Minister, offering less tax on the pensions of the richest 1% and harsher social security sanctions. You can read my thoughts in Nation.Cymru [here](#).

I used the speech to raise the **Mineworkers Pension Scheme** - the Government should not be in the business of profiting from the pensions of ex-miners - and should return the £1.2bn out of the reserve pot to the ex-miners. I also took the chance to raise the fact that the Tories have refused to pay the legacy costs to **make coal tips safe** on our hillsides. It has been three years now since Storm Dennis, but we cannot relax while these coal tips continue to pose a danger to our communities. We need that money now.

Frustratingly, the Government are continuing the lie that **HS2** is an 'England and Wales' scheme, depriving Wales of some **£5bn** in consequential funding. They have disgracefully now also labelled Northern Powerhouse Rail as 'England and Wales' meaning at least another billion pounds that Wales won't see. I also raised this in my speech, which

you can see on the parliament website [here](#).

More than 130,000 PCS Union members were out on strike on Budget day, and I joined them on picket lines outside the Home Office and BEIS. Teachers in England were also out on strike that day, with a huge rally of teachers and civil servants showing their solidarity at Trafalgar Square.

This month I led a **Westminster Hall debate** on the subject of **pay in the civil service**. It is a disgrace that over a quarter of DWP staff are paid so little that they are dependent on the increase in the National Living wage, not their employer, to receive an increase in their pay this April. I couldn't hide my frustrations with the Minister who has it within his gift to raise people's living standards, but has chosen not to do so. You can read about the debate on the PCS website [here](#) or watch it back on the parliament website [here](#).

On the subject of solidarity, I have worked with RCT Trades Council to organise a **'Solidarity Concert'** to raise funds for local charities. The event will take place on 1st April at Jacs Aberdare and will feature amazing local acts Cripplecreek, Jeff Japers & DJ Gareth Hopkins.

The Trades Council have decided that all the funds raised should be distributed among food banks covering Rhondda Cynon Taf. Please be sure to book your tickets now if you haven't already and **I look forward to seeing you on Saturday night!**



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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

March 8th is International Women’s Day. On the day itself, I joined a fantastic demonstration at parliament by the WASPI women who have been treated so appallingly. There were powerful speeches, as well as singing and chanting. It was a fantastic atmosphere, and a pleasure to meet campaigners from Swansea and Llanelli.

Earlier in the month, I dropped into Cynon Valley Museum to have a look not only at Karin Mear's outstanding (as always) **'Women and the Valleys'** exhibition, but also the CND Cymru exhibition put together by local women. Women in the Valleys has finished, but there is still a 'Forgotten Voices' exhibition on the role played by women in the Miner's Strike.

WELSH LABOUR CONFERENCE

Welsh Labour Conference took place in March, and it was great to travel up to Llandudno as always. It felt like a privilege to be in the room for Mark Drakeford's speech, speaking about “the intolerable burden of grief” after the loss of his wife Claire, and stressing the need that we “never leave to tomorrow the difference that we can make today”.

In the context of the Illegal Migration Bill, it was powerful to hear him speak of his pride at Wales’ ambition to be a Nation of Sanctuary and offer a warm welcome to refugees “from wherever and however they come to our shores”. He also emphasised the need for constitutional change to create a more democratic and inclusive political system.

I spoke at a number of fringe events at Conference, including a Cwmpas fringe, where I spoke about Community Wealth building proposals here in Cynon Valley; Welsh Labour Grassroots, where I shared a platform with Mark Drakeford and others, and Labour for a new Democracy, which focused on the need for constitutional change.



CYNON VALLEY CHAMPIONS

Stevie Jay Pyne and Emily Louise Davies from autism charity Autismandus are the latest winners of my ‘Cynon Valley Champions’ award. In only a year, these inspiring women have built a fantastic support network and offer all kinds of support to families of children with ASD in Cynon Valley and across South Wales.

As parents of children with ASD, they wanted to use their own experiences navigating the health and education systems to help as many families as possible. Their dedication and passion to push for positive change is so inspiring and I know this is just the start. Contact me if you would like to nominate a ‘Cynon Valley Champion’.





CYNON VALLEY

Last weekend, I joined lots of fundraisers, including Cllr Tina Williams and Derek the weather, on a '**Sepsis Savvy Walk**' from Cwmaman to Aberdare to raise money for Sepsis Trust UK. It is such an important cause, and I must pay credit to Michelle Christopher, who organised the event and who does so much to raise awareness of the potentially devastating impact of Sepsis.

RCT Palestine Solidarity Campaign this month organised for three **Palestinian women**, Naheel, Im Shadi and Afnan to come and speak to us in Cynon Valley about the history of Palestine. It was so moving to hear some of their stories, about the challenges and restrictions they face, and the way the Israeli occupation affects their daily lives. I must say a special thank you to Cllr Mustapha Maohoub, whose translation skills came in handy and really made a difference, I think, in helping to make the women feel at home.

This month marked 25 years of **Interlink** bringing together and supporting voluntary organisations in RCT. Interlink are holding three events to celebrate, and it was an honour to be asked to speak at the Cynon leg of the 'Connecting Communities' events. More than that, it was lovely to catch up with so many of the amazing Cynon based groups!

Throughout the month of March, RCT Council have made all **bus trips free** in Rhondda Cynon Taf. At a time when we are thinking about our relationship with transport, this is a really positive step in exploring how we can encourage people to use public transport. This will make an especially big difference in communities like Cynon Valley where car ownership is low, and will enable people to travel who might not otherwise be able to. I look forward to seeing the results of the pilot and hope it can be repeated.

UK Parliament has a very good outreach and education department, and a dedicated education officer based in Wales. This month, they came up to **Penderyn Primary**. The pupils really enjoyed learning about the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Crown and how they all interact.

I recently organised a Round Table event in St Elvan's, bringing experts from across Wales together to discuss the '**Green Skills**' we are going to need in the future. We need a radical and urgent plan to train local people so that places like Cynon Valley can compete for the green investment of the future.

Mountain Ash was declared this month as the 'Rising Star' for Wales in the Visa 'Let's **Celebrate Towns**' competition. The award means Mountain Ash will be awarded £10,000 to invest in community initiatives. Well done to RCT Council for making the application, and so bringing that investment into Mountain Ash.

Also successful in bringing in investment this month were Lee Gardens Pool, Cynon Valley Organic Adventures and the Community Impact Initiative, all of whom were awarded money from the **National Lottery Community fund**. That's a total of £49,421 for community projects in Cynon Valley.



The Sepsis Savvy walk with Cllr Williams & Derek the weather.



Welcoming our Palestinian visitors to my office.



Celebrating 25 years of Interlink with Lee Gardens Pool



IN PARLIAMENT

I have had the privilege of welcoming a little bit of Cynon Valley up to parliament this month. First, it was a pleasure to welcome **Dr Mike Thomas** and his wife Margaret up to parliament, following his being awarded an MBE. Mike has made a huge and lasting contribution to Cynon Valley, not just through the choirs that keep him busy every night of the week, but also as a teacher at Blaengwawr Comprehensive school, and having raised thousands for good causes.

The following week, I welcomed **Ray & Tracey from Grey Trees** brewery, as the award-winning Mosaic Pale Ale is currently being showcased at the Strangers Bar in the palace of Westminster. Grey Trees is one of Cynon Valley's greatest exports. It is so important to me to shout about all the amazing assets we have in Cynon Valley and getting an award-winning ale like Mosaic on tap in parliament seemed to me a good way to celebrate such a fantastic local business.

This month has seen the Tories ramp up their racist rhetoric as they attempt to force through the **'Illegal Migration' Bill**. This legislation is unworkable and illegal, as it says on its front cover, but it is also immoral. The Tories believe they have already lost the next election, and they are trying to find a way to divide the working class, no matter the consequences. We cannot underestimate how dangerous that is. I gave a speech on this [here](#) and wrote my thoughts up for [Labour Outlook](#), using Mark Drakeford's words about welcoming refugees.

Gary Lineker rightly tweeted in support of refugees, showing care and compassion for those fleeing violence. The BBC disgracefully temporarily 'stepped-back' Gary from presenting Match of the Day. They got it badly wrong, and I was delighted to see Ian Wright start a wave of solidarity that more or less brought the sports programming to a stop until the BBC eventually backed down and reinstated Lineker.

There was a **Stand up to Racism** event in Cardiff on March 18th, where I spoke about the need to oppose the rotten anti-asylum bill and get this rotten Tory Government out. There were also brilliant speeches from Cynon Valley's own Tony Mansell for the BFAWU Union and Jason Richards from the CWU Union.

This month, **Martin Forde KC** went public on the fact that he has not heard from the Labour party since he concluded that there was a hierarchy of racism in the Labour party and that anti-black racism was not taken as seriously as other forms of racism. If the Labour Party is to eradicate racism in the party, it must fully implement the recommendations of the Forde report.

I was called to ask a **DWP Question** this month and asked the Minister about the disgracefully high number of DWP staff who are having to use food banks to get by.

Welsh Affairs Committee met this month to discuss both water quality and local broadcasting in Wales. Terry Mann from local radio station GTFM came to give evidence to that session and was brilliant.

The other Committee I sit on is the **Public Affairs and Constitutional Affairs Committee** and this month we questioned Michael Gove on the work of his Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Department. You can watch that session [here](#). The Committee also heard from the PCS and FDA Trade Unions about levels of pay in the civil service.

On **St David's Day**, I asked a question about money which has been denied Wales over the years, and [wrote in Labour List](#) calling for a new, fairer, needs-based funding settlement for Wales.



With Ray & Tracey at the Strangers' bar in parliament



With fellow MPs at the budget day demonstration



A St David's Day gathering of Welsh MPs