

# 2018 Review

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# My Year 2018

My review of 2017 included a comment that it had been like living in a volcano. Well, despite the saying that a week is a long time in politics...nothing's changed! Despite two years of negotiations, the UK Tory Government have failed to deliver a Brexit deal that protects jobs, rights, security and fails to ensure a strong and collaborative future relationship with EU.

Despite twenty nine resignations and series of u-turns, Mrs. May continues to hang on as we approach 2019 and exit day looms. However, with the meaningful vote scheduled for the week beginning 14th January and with her deal destined to fail, it's anyone's guess what will happen afterwards and it's safe to say we will be entering uncharted territory.

In other news, Welsh Labour elected a new Deputy Leader in April and a new Leader in December. My congratulations go to the new First Minister for Wales Mark Drakeford and I am looking forward to working with him and his Welsh Government to hold the Tories to account and deliver for Wales. I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank my friend and outgoing First Minister Carwyn Jones for all his support over the years, and for all he has done for our Country.

On a personal level 2018 has been a special one, travelling to New Zealand to see my daughter get married. It was a truly wonderful wedding and a moment of joy during turbulent times.

I want to wish everyone a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year, I look forward to working with you all.



### **January - Hendry Review One Year On...**

January 12th 2018 was a year since the publication of the Government's independent review into tidal lagoons. Led by former Tory Energy Minister Charles Hendry, the report recommended Government support for tidal lagoons, and urged they commit to the first one in Swansea Bay, as a "no regrets" decision.

To mark the occasion, I joined Swansea Council Leader Rob Stewart and Ioan Jenkins (picture above) of Tidal Lagoon Power to hand out birthday cake in Swansea Market as a way of reminding the UK Government just how long they're taking to make a decision. Alas, the Tories continued their broken promises for Wales and finally reneged on their commitment in June. Nevertheless, the idea isn't sunk just yet, and there are plans to resurrect the lagoon as a stand-alone project without the need for Tory Government funding.

## **February - 100 Years of Women**



February 2018 marked 100 years since some women became legally eligible to vote in public elections. In February 1918, the Representation of the People Act came into force, giving certain property-owning women over 30 the right to vote in elections. It was a further decade before the franchise was extended to all women and men over the age of 21.

I was humbled to mark the occasion with fellow women Parliamentarians and to think about the long Suffragette struggle in the years leading up to 1918 Act, and of course beyond it. With only 11 female Welsh MPs out of 40 (which is a record number - 10 of which are Labour), there is still much to do to support the representation of women in politics.



### **March - St. David's Day in London**



Questions to the Secretary of State for Wales took place on the 14th March, where MPs took to the Chamber to raise a wide range of issues including cross border economic links, rail infrastructure and steel. I was at the dispatch box to question the Welsh Secretary on the UK Government's EU Withdrawal Bill and the effect on Wales.

This year's St. David's Day was marked in Westminster with a special service in The Chapel of St. Mary's Undercroft. The location was the perfect setting for a service which included a performance from a superb Welsh Tenor and Welsh harpist, as well as a rendition of Calon Lan by children from the London Welsh Primary School.

Readings were given by Glyn Davies MP, on behalf of the Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns MP, Ben Lake MP on behalf of Plaid Cymru, and I was extremely honoured to represent Welsh Labour as Shadow Secretary of State for Wales. The event was officiated by my friend the Speaker's Chaplain, Reverend Rose Hudson-Wilkin.

## **April - Carwyn Makes an Announcement**



This year's Welsh Labour Conference took place in a very sunny Llandudno, where I was honoured to give my second conference speech as Shadow Welsh Secretary.

The conference was dominated by First Minister Carwyn Jones' announcement that he was standing down. Carwyn's contribution to both Welsh Labour and Welsh public life has been immense. His Welsh Labour Government has improved the life chances of people across our country, and as his speech showed, continues to deliver for those people who need us most. Wales – and Welsh Labour – owe him a debt of gratitude for his selfless service. I have been proud to work alongside him, and am proud to call him a friend.

Also in April I was pleased to accompany Shadow Minister for Steel, Gill Furniss MP, on a visit to TATA Port Talbot to speak with the local workforce and union representatives about the state of the sector and the failures of the UK Tory Government to protect and grow the steel industry.

## **May - Communities Mark May Day**



This year's May Day turned out to be the sunniest on record, and was matched by the very warm welcome Jeremy and I had at celebrations at Blaenhondda and Melincryddan. It was great to see the efforts of hardworking volunteers rewarded with great weather and an even better turn out. I was delighted to bump into old friends and catch up with colleagues, none more so than Nicola Hemsley, founder and Managing Director of Organised Kaos, a community enterprise circus training school, targeting young people at risk of social exclusion. Undoubtedly the star turn of the day was the Organised Kaos circus performance which was as hair-raising as it was enthralling!

It is with great privilege that I spoke at the tribute service to my friend the Reverend Canon Stephen Ryan, who retired from his post as Team Rector in Neath Rectorial Benefice in May.

## **June - Training to Win**



June saw the announcement of the new rail franchise in Wales, one which sets out a programme of work that will transform rail travel and deliver the transport our country deserves. Transport for Wales will introduce new trains, better stations and more services.

Locally, I was thrilled to visit the boxing club in Cwmgwrach and meet Head Coach Leighton. The club was set up a while back and has made the Cabin its home, redesigning the internal space and kitting it out with money secured from local renewable energy funds.

Since campaigning for the 2015 General Election I have been a great supporter of Seven Sisters Ladies and have adopted them as my local team. In return, they've adopted me as their mascot, and in 2016 made me their patron. I follow them throughout their cup run every year, and for the third year running I went to Bedwas RFC (where the finals are held) to watch complete against Tumble for the WRU Women's Plate.



## **July - Happy Birthday NHS**



July was a month where we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the NHS, and to mark the occasion, Welsh Labour organised the Bevan Festival in Tredegar, the home town of its founder Aneurin Bevan. Bevan famously said he would “Tredegar-ise” the country, basing the NHS on the model of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society. I was delighted to speak at the event, introducing the Shadow Health Secretary Jon Ashworth, as well as the Welsh Labour Government’s Cabinet Secretary for Health Vaughan Gething.

I was also humbled and honoured to attend the opening of Rhianna’s Swing at Neath’s Gnoll Park, where a fully accessible swing and accompanying play park has been established. Rhianna was a local girl who unfortunately lost her life before she was able to access such a facility, and her friend Kobi took up the challenge, securing funding from Big Lottery to create a park as a fitting and wonderful legacy to Rhianna. I was proud to support the campaign early on, hosting a Parliamentary reception.

### **August - A Recess to Remember**



Once again Neath Town became a veritable showcase for some of the best real ales and ciders in the region as the festival entered its fifth year this past August. Organised by a tenacious group of volunteers and supported by Neath Town Centre Consortium, Neath Inspired and Neath Town Council, the event promoted eight ciders and thirty real ales all produced at breweries within a 30 mile radius.

Having attended every event, I am amazed at its growing success and I'd like to praise its organisers for delivering a memorable occasion. I am always impressed by just how well organised the event is, despite getting bigger each year. There is always a friendly safe atmosphere and a brilliant selection of local drinks. It's clear it has become the premier craft ale and cider event in the Swansea Bay area, even if I say so myself, and I am already looking forward to next year.

## **September - Remembering a Legend**



On Tuesday 18th September I attended a very moving ceremony at Neath Train Station, organised to unveil memorial plaques for Lance Corporal Allan Leonard Lewis VC of the 6th Battalion Northampton Regiment. Speaking at the event his great niece Dawn Lewis spoke of Lance Corporal Lewis' heroic bravery on the battlefield, gaining the VC for his actions in single-handedly securing the surrender of an attacking enemy battalion.

The 18th September marked 100 years since that fateful moment, and the event and plaques were organised by Arriva Trains and Great Western Railway as a way of commemorating his time on the railways before the start of the First World War.



## **October - A Town of Festivals**



This past October saw the return of the Neath Food and Drink Festival, now in its tenth year, where thousands of people descended on Neath once more to enjoy the fares of the best produce made in the Neath and South Wales region.

At the event launch on Friday the 5th October, I was delighted to visit stalls with Neath Town Mayor Cllr. Mark Protheroe and Neath Port Talbot Council Leader Cllr. Rob Jones. It's such a treat to visit the annual food and drink festival, which marks the end of summer and the start of autumn, and it's always a good opportunity to make some early Christmas present purchases. I'm extremely proud of our great town of Neath and want to personally thank everyone for all their hard work in keeping this brilliant event going.

Also in October was the Keir Hardie Lecture organised by Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney Labour Party and given by Carwyn Jones AM. I was privileged to hear Carwyn speak about his time and achievements during his past 9 years as First Minister of Wales.



## **November - 100 Years Since the Great War**



Neath has a great tradition of remembrance, coming together to pay respect to the fallen in our communities and beyond. 2018 marks the centenary of the end of the First World War, and 11am on the 11th of November marked exactly 100 years since Armistice Day, making events this year particularly poignant.

Cwmllynfell also marked the centenary of the end of The Great War by unveiling a memorial to members of the community who fought in both World Wars but never returned. I attended the ceremony which was hugely moving and respectfully conducted. Broadcast live on S4C, the event included performances from local children and Gyrlais Male Voice Choir, who sang "Tell My Father" - there wasn't a dry eye in Cwmllynfell.

I was humbled to attend such a touching ceremony and we must never forget the ultimate sacrifice made by those who never returned to their families and friends.

## **December - A New First Minister For Wales**



December saw Mark Drakeford AM elected Leader of Welsh Labour and First Minister for Wales. Mark was elected after taking 53.9% of the vote compared to 41.4% for Vaughan Gething. Mark has previously served as Special Adviser to Rhodri Morgan when Rhodri was First Minister, and most recently as the Welsh Government's Cabinet Secretary for Finance Secretary. My congratulations go to Mark and I look forward to working with him. The week following his election as FM Mark visited Westminster and addressed Welsh Labour MPs showing his commitment to working together to stand up for Wales.

Congratulations also go to my Neath colleague Jeremy Miles AM, who has retained his position as Counsel General and has taken on a new brief as Brexit Minister.



Team Neath in Christmas jumpers on Christmas Jumper Day 14th December 2018.



Thank you to everyone who attended my advice drop in sessions in 2018.



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