



## CHRISTMAS CHEER DAMPENED BY GHOST OF GOVE

A very pleasant social occasion took place on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> December as Redbridge Retired Teachers gathered to celebrate the "Season of Goodwill".

A record number for such a gathering enjoyed good food and sociable company for a couple of hours, accompanied by seasonal music. We also welcomed representatives from Redbridge Pensioners Association and Dominic Byrne from Barking & Dagenham, who is an NUT Executive Member.

Dominic briefed the members on recent action at Stratford Academy and Connaught School. He also warned us of the threat to teachers and our education system by the Con-Dem coalition. The proliferation of Academies and Free Schools is a severe threat to our Union. They are not accountable to local people through their Councils and are allowed to employ unqualified teaching staff. (I never ever thought I would live to hear of such a thing happening!)

Dominic suggested that Conference would face a choice of accepting this situation, which could result in the Union having no presence in these schools or allowing unqualified people teaching in Academies & Free Schools to join our Union. A third option might be to open the Union to all people employed in schools but this would inevitably bring us into conflict with unions such as Unison, Unite and GNB. I am sure that would not be desirable.

The other threat, already evident from the Autumn Statement, is to national pay bargaining. This is clearly not in the interest of our members. The present Government is set on weakening our unions. It is determined to offer more and more opportunities to dodgy profit-making companies in pursuit of its dangerous ideological path. We will need to win the confidence of parents on the matter of unqualified teaching staff or it will all end in tears. However, in spite of everything, we do wish all our retired members a better year in 2013.

**Bill Harrison**

## Debating Education: Labour Party Conference, 2012

What a wonderful chance it was to go to Annual Conference; previously the event had occurred in term time, so I was never able to attend. Now, a year into retirement, I set off to Manchester.

My main purpose was to get a clearer idea about some of the major landmark changes currently occurring, namely Academies, free schools, the raising of the school leaving age and the e-bac.

After attending a very productive Women's event on the Saturday, I focused particularly on educational matters. As I had stopped teaching when the Baccalaureate plans were still on the table, I was fascinated to hear a critical view of the current legislation, especially as a youth centre that I had often used to house the CLA (Children Looked After) Summer University programme had become a primary free school the month after I had taken early retirement. Such events left me feeling helpless but the Conference enabled me to gain a broader view than I had from my kitchen sink and home computer.

A key debate highlighted schools that had been affected by the introduction of the new academies. Whilst I was aware of some worrying local cases, until you speak to those who have been fighting the changes, what's happening can just feel like a painless news bite.

In his passionate keynote speech, Ed Miliband emphasised that many MPs, although certainly not most of the present Cabinet, had benefited directly from Labour's education policies, which had enabled working-class people and recent arrivals to the UK to become upwardly mobile. For example, Chuka Umuna, talked about his late father, who had recognised that it was the Labour Party that had insisted that he - and others like him - 'should be able to pursue their aspirations and dreams free from prejudice.'

The opportunity to participate in events with unions and fringe-groups was a truly unique chance to learn from those with campaigning responsibilities. I particularly valued the training led by Arnie Graf (a campaigner for Barack Obama) as well as by others who were more local. Now that I have more time available to me I will, as recommended, try to get more involved in exploiting social media as a campaign tool. It is important to recognise that your voice is as crucial as your vote. In that way you can lobby and engage with others, whether or not they are of the same opinion/perspective.

Finally, it was heartening to hear Ed Miliband pay tribute to the first four black MPs - Dianne Abbot, Keith Vaz, Bernie Grant (deceased) and Paul Boateng - and award them their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary plaque and commendation.

**Barbara Roymacauley**

### NEWS NOTES

**Beal High School** will become one of the largest in London when its current intake of 1800 pupils increases to 2500 after the completion of a new three storey building and sixth-form centre. The expansion is intended to cater for the growing number of school-aged children in the Borough.

**Redbridge Drama Centre** is to remain open after the Council 'scrapped' its original proposal to close the Centre and agreed to continue funding it - although by a reduced amount.

**Doris Greenstein**, a leading member of both the Redbridge Pensioners' Forum and the RRTA has stepped down from her role on the Social Committee of the former organisation. Forum chairman, John Coombes, thanked Doris for her hard work and life president Chris Wilson said: 'She's been the most reliable person I've known. Doris, it was a great pleasure working with you.'

## What Have the LEAs Done for Us?

Governments are keen to free schools from local authority control. The thin end of this wedge was Local Management of Schools (LMS), then Grant Maintained Schools and now we have Academies and Free Schools. The latter give Headteachers greater power to run schools without interference from the LEA.

Apart from very serious considerations like pay and conditions, caring for Special needs children, input from the parents and the community, there is another aspect of the new educational institutions that needs to be considered.

Teachers and Head teachers are experts in education but they may not have the expert knowledge of such other matters as the purchase and leasing of equipment, especially in primary schools.

### Panorama Investigation

Judging by the BBC Panorama programme of 24 September 2012, many schools are being tricked by companies into buying or leasing overpriced equipment. For example -

- A laptop costing £458 was leased to a school for £3038
- A fax machine costing £1512 was leased to a school for £42,000
- A £10,995 photocopier was leased for £174,787
- A school was charged £1000, 000 for 330 laptops, 110 of which weren't even delivered

All of this would not have happened before the end of LEA control because the contracts would have needed its approval. However, the experts giving advice to schools are gone due to the cuts.

Bear in mind that Headteachers are under immense pressure from Ofsted for results; they are then, grateful to someone who comes to them with a solution to their IT problems - even if that someone has a vested interest.

### Financial Costs

As a result, some schools find themselves in debt, with one owing £1..4m and another, £1M. Whilst the salesmen of the companies drive Maserati cars.

Headteachers have been sacked or resigned as a result of the scandal. But the biggest victims are the children who will not get the education they deserve.

Remember this is tax payers' money. It is only be a matter of time before a school runs out of money, which will mean that staff will have to go. Worse if the school goes bankrupt, a private company will be asked to take it over, not the LEA. Mission accomplished for the Tories and unfortunately for New Labour.

Think what would happen if GPs are given control of their practices!

**Bhasker Bhadresha**

### ARTICLES WANTED

**The RRTA Newsletter would like to publish your opinions, ideas and experiences.**

**The following types of article are particularly welcome -**

- **Strong opinion pieces**
- **Humorous recollections of school experiences**
- **Reports etc of what you are doing in your retirement**

## Angry Redbridge Teachers Want Action

Retired NUT members, who have participated in previous disputes, will be pleased to know that their fighting spirit is still alive in the new generation. At a packed NUT Branch meeting, Redbridge teachers, including several School Representatives, expressed their intense anger at the current Government proposals to change their pay and conditions - proposals that will increase insecurity and significantly reduce salaries.

Kicking-off the meeting, Kash Mallick, the Divisional Secretary, spoke passionately about the way in which most teachers, once they fully understood the financial implications of what is being proposed are strongly in support of strike action. He also expressed outrage at the practice of several Redbridge Headteachers, who ignore their staff's current legal rights and force teachers to do more than is required by law to achieve UPS2 and 3.

Kash also expressed bewilderment and frustration at the National Executive's failure up to now to back strike action and hoped for a different outcome at their next meeting. He emphasised what was at stake in the present dispute with Government and foresaw the casualisation of the profession if teachers didn't resist Gove's policies.

Other teachers also expressed their strongly held concerns and views. One talked about the financial difficulties he and his family were facing, another of the lie, perpetrated by the Government, that no money was available and a third of anxieties about the consequences of the proposed changes to pensions.

Some additions to or alternatives to whole-day(s) strike action were suggested, including a programme of rolling action, the withholding of course-work marks and non-co-operation with Ofsted - all of which, it was argued, could make a significant impact.

Several teachers put the case for the importance of developing a long-term realistic strategy - for example, a one-day strike every month - that could be pursued until the Government backed down. The importance of educating NUT members about why such a strategy is necessary and of gaining mass support, as in the 1980s, was recognised.

Finally, it was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Union Executive expressing the views of the Redbridge Branch and urging a more positive and robust approach in the future. Members wanted to send 'a blistering message' to the Union that emphasised that Redbridge teachers were prepared to fight to avoid the 'nightmare' scenario that would follow if the Government won.

Mike Peters

**Redbridge Retired Teachers' Association  
(A section of the NUT)**  
**Invites retired teachers to a Coffee Morning from 11 am.**  
**Thursday 21st March,**  
**at the Olive Branch, Wanstead, a few yards from Wanstead tube station**  
**and The George Pub**

**Coffee and Pastries provided**  
**Catch up with former friends, colleagues and acquaintances**  
**Need a lift... contact one of following -**  
**Bob Archer 07956 656 086, bobarcher46@btinternet.com**  
**Liz Dolan 0208 505 2422, edolan118@btinternet.com**  
**Lydia Kirby 0208 501 3194, lydiai@tiscali.co.uk**