



IMPRESSIVE PARENTS TELL US THEIR SECRET

Our Annual Christmas Social was held at the Methodist Hall, near Gants Hill, on Thursday 5th. December. About 20 members and guests gathered for a sociable afternoon.

The main Guests were two members of the Parents' Action Group that averted the imposition of Academy status on Snaresbrook Primary School last year. Catherine Dwyer and Victoria Baskerville told our members how they had formed their group of parents to oppose the Government's attempt to force the school, against the wishes of staff and governors, to become an Academy after the school had been put in Special Measures following an Ofsted Report last June. They were fortunate to have a range of expertise in their group, including lawyers who were able to give good advice on legal requirements and tactics.

The parents raised a petition, with 2000 signatures, to take to Downing Street and sought information and advice from other campaigns, including the unsuccessful one for Downhills School in Tottenham. Crucially, the School had an improvement plan in place with a new Head and was able to demonstrate substantial progress without being turned into an Academy.

Together, the parents ran a hugely effective campaign enlisting the support of all the political parties on Redbridge Council and by the 29th. October Mr Gove, fearful of more bad publicity following the free school scandals at Al-Madinah in Derby and the Discovery New School in Crawley, had backed down.

The Snaresbrook campaign has demonstrated that it is possible, with a united school community and the unanimous support of the local authority, to defeat forced academisation by central government. We congratulate the parents of the School and the politicians on Redbridge Council on their success. They have won a major battle. Now we must all go on to win the War.

Bill Harrison

The Second Secret Reflection of Andrew Vole (aged 57 and three-quarters)

As I write, we approach the next day of strike action - from which, I discover, the NASUWT have now opted out. Of course, as an older NUT member, with only a year or two remaining, I could take the view that any strike is of no benefit to me and that maybe a nice quiet life in the ATL for a year or so might be just the ticket.

Well call me a silly old fool, guilty of what Ayn Rand might have despised as 'altruism', but for some reason, I just can't stop caring about British education and what the future holds for my younger colleagues. Many of these colleagues show a full appreciation of the nature of the threat facing them, their pay and conditions of service. Some, unfortunately, are already thinking about getting out of the profession. However, there are a minority who seem not be able to see beyond 'number 1' and the very short-term, and have a blithe disregard for the issues pointed out very clearly to them. At times, one may be tempted to think that such individuals deserve everything they get.



It seems to me, though, that fight we must, since the whole direction of travel of Government and 'Govian' policy is to lead to fragmentation and privatisation of the British (or at least, the English & Welsh) education system, with greater disparities between educational standards in different schools rather than fewer. I will, therefore, support whole-heartedly any action my Union calls – no matter what I sometimes think about their overall strategy.

The 'pensions' issue is one of the most important. It's appalling the way we have been 'ripped-off' by the Government reducing our take-home pay (in most cases) in each of the last three years, on the basis of lies told about the sustainability of the TPS. What is worse is the expectation that teachers will work until 68 – or even longer? Given the signs of decline noted in a previous issue of this publication, one can only seriously doubt whether many teachers will feel able to reach this age. And further to this, an increasingly draconian set of 'capability procedures' will no doubt 'assist' people out of the profession before then anyway. Since we already see in our locality, a disproportionately high number of older teachers targeted (even under existing procedures), you do not need to be a genius to work out what is going to happen. It is not coincidental that these measures are introduced contemporaneously - the Government know full well that the days of teaching as a sustainable lifetime career are numbered, should these 'reforms' be allowed to stand.

The 'mining' of a seam of younger, cheaper hard-working teachers with few other commitments or encumbrances (yes – like a long-term partner, or, heaven forbid, their own children) is a practice not uncommon to many academies or free schools, but is spreading more widely. Increasing pressures on school budgets will ensure that wages are suppressed via 'performance management', with built-in failure embedded in impossible targets, and that older more expensive staff will be 'bounced out' via 'capability'. This is how George Osborne may 'expect to make savings on the teachers' wage bill', in addition to the shifting of the employer's pension contribution load onto employees.

Whilst I can only wonder at the energy and commitment of many younger colleagues, I would suggest that a loss of a balanced age-structure in the teaching work-force is not desirable for pupils. A situation may be envisaged where teachers 'stick' the job and the ridiculously increased pressures for 5-10 years before quitting to be replaced by the next fresh-faced crop out of university. It would also not surprise me to see a crisis in the next few years in teacher retention and recruitment, especially if the economy does continue to recover.

Actually, never mind the 'altruism' - what I want is as many of these younger teachers to stay in the job for as long as possible. After all, it's their pension contributions that will be paying for my pension for (hopefully) the next 30 years or so!

Anon

DID WE REALLY EVER HAVE IT SO GOOD?



Bill Harrison asks - Are we the lucky generation?

It has become fashionable to "accuse" the baby-boom generation of being lucky (or is it greedy?) to justify removing the perks of old-age. Commentators suggest that our grandchildren will be poorer than their parents because of our "good fortune". Are such accusations justified?

We can certainly accept that we benefited from the good deeds of the 1945 - 51 Labour Governments and the post-war consensus. We enjoyed mainly full employment, free University education, good pension provision (state and private) for which we contributed throughout our working lives. We also benefited from the NHS - all that orange juice and cod-liver oil included. Now it is up to the younger generations to protect and, where necessary, restore it if they have the will.

A central accusation is that we were able to buy houses relatively cheaply and gain from rapidly rising values as they turned into capital assets. (Incidentally, we did have to cope with interest-rates somewhat higher than 0.5%). However, as we grow older and need personal care etc. these assets have to be liquidized to pay for it, although some are likely to pass on to the younger generations.

Undoubtedly, expectations have risen since the 1950s. As children we endured serious austerity in the post-war years, including rationing of food and clothing into the 1950s. Those of us from modest working-class backgrounds did not enjoy the consumer goods now taken for granted. My parents' house had no telephone, refrigerator, TV, stereo-system, car or central heating until I was finishing secondary school. Credit cards were unknown and consumer credit was strictly controlled. The prevailing mantra was to cut one's coat according to one's cloth. People then did not expect to have everything at once.

One result of the wealth accumulated in the boom years has been that children have been able to resort to the bank of Mum and Dad or even Grandparents, which was never available to most of our generation.

For those of us employed in the public sector, pay was relatively modest and we were encouraged to think of our "generous pensions" as deferred income.

Should we feel guilty about our early retirement, bus passes, free TV licences, winter fuel payments etc?

Not while the wealth gap between top and bottom continues to grow and the financial services industry awards obscene bonuses. Dignity in old age is one of the values of a civilised society. If we don't strive to defend it no-one else will. After all, we are still one of the richest countries in the world.

What do you think? Whether you agree or disagree you should write down your views for the next Newsletter.

Please send your ideas/articles to the RRTA Newsletter Editor at mikepeters1@ntlworld.com

Retired Teachers' Convention (8th October '13)



A delegation of seven retired teachers from Redbridge attended the Retired Teachers' Convention at Hamilton House last October. As in previous years the occasion was a stimulating combination of talks and discussions, with an excellent buffet lunch thrown in.

One focus of the day was directed at giving us the latest information about current and proposed action being taken by the NUT and other unions to combat the difficult situation which Coalition Government measures are creating within the education world. It was made clear that some of the apparent inaction of the NUT administration is the result of press reluctance to publish information given by the union.

David Wilson, NUT Principal Officer (organising and action) outlined ways in which local action could become more effective through organisation and collaboration between schools. This will increasingly be needed to provide a lifeline for teachers in academies, where it is beginning to seem as though anything goes. Some of the significant changes to the curriculum were outlined by Helen Hill, NUT Principal Officer (secondary education). Again this appears to be an area full of pitfalls and the increasing emphasis on fairly narrow criteria for assessment will undoubtedly lead to a much restricted educational opportunity for all children. We heard a rousing speech from the President, Beth Davies - a definite encouragement to stand firm as a profession!

A second focus was a series of talks on the subject of retirement. Some of the points made would perhaps have been more appropriately addressed to teachers about to retire; most of those present had already burnt their boats. However, the material was interesting, including advice on tax issues, using reduced finances sensibly, and of course - possibly the most apposite - how to manage time and freedom in positive ways, for example local networking, volunteering, acting as school governors, acquiring new skills and interests.

The Redbridge contingent have subsequently discussed ways in which we, as a local organisation, can put some of these ideas into practice, particularly in terms of supporting those still teaching. All in all, it was a thought-provoking day and is an event that would be well worth attending, if you are free, next time.

Liz Dolan

NUT News from Bob Archer, President of the Redbridge Association

As we go to press, the NUT is preparing national strike action to "Stand Up for Education" and to defend schools and teachers from Gove's policies.

The NUT's campaign against Academies has gained growing support as the dust starts to settle on the experience of the government putting "rocket boosters" under the programme.

On the curriculum, there are many voices warning that not enough space and prominence is provided for the arts. Most of the public, however, will be more familiar with the row over the teaching of history, especially regarding how World War I is remembered. Gove seems determined to rebuild the sort of unchallenged "natural" hierarchy of political elites who plunged the continent into war in 1914.

Where schools adopt unacceptable appraisal and salary policies, the NUT encourages members to campaign up to and including strike action. The Salaries policy Redbridge has adopted is NOT acceptable and RTA will support any school group wanting to take the issue up with their management.

Finally, Michael Gove recently asked the STRB to remove the following from the School Teacher Pay and Conditions Document: 1265 directed hours a year, the limit of 195 working days a year, the protection of PPA time, "rarely cover", the ban on lunch-time supervision by teachers and the ban on administrative tasks. **Incredibly the STRB turned him down on just about everything.** Could it be that the public mood is turning?
