



NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS
REDBRIDGE RETIRED MEMBERS
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NUT GOES GLOBAL



The introduction to the Union's International solidarity strategy says: `The Union opposes oppression, fights for trade union and human and civil rights, champions public services, campaigns for equality and social justice and challenges neo-liberalism.` It's a big agenda but a vital part of the Union's work and identity.

The NUT is active in our Global Federation, Education International. It has joined the steering committee of Support the People of Turkey and is active on the Kurdish Question. On the 1916 World Teachers' Day we focused on the position of colleagues in Turkey. Since then, alas, the situation has worsened, making life harder for them and for all the progressive people in the country. Thus, we must maintain our support and solidarity activities and delegations, which we know are appreciated by our sister union, Egitem Sen.

Outside Europe

Beyond Europe, the NUT is active in EI's campaign against privatisation at a global level, for example in Uganda. I am also particularly proud of the Union's work with Justice for Colombia. Without the work of JFC we might not have seen the historic peace accord after 50 years of civil war. Furthermore, the Union is partnering with our sister union in Nicaragua on an exciting project coming up in the Summer. As the photo that accompanies this article shows, the years of under investment in education before the return of Sandanista government has taken a toll on schools but the politics and philosophy of the current government is putting a new emphasis on the value of education for all.

A big concern for the Union is, of course, the plight of the Palestinian people. We have worked over many years with the General Union of Palestinian Teachers to assist with capacity building and developing women activists. We now have a large number of members who are well prepared to visit associations to share their experience of what life is like for Palestinians under occupation, to talk about child prisoners and what individuals and associations can do to engage in the campaign.

The Fight Continues

Education is a battleground in many places, precisely because in general, teachers are well organised in strong unions and determined to support each other at local, regional and global level. Many of the gains made in Latin America are under attack, the populist right is on the rise on both sides of the Atlantic and at home the uncertainty caused by Brexit has led to anxiety in many communities. All of these are issues to which the Union is giving attention. The NUT can't solve the many problems that teachers face globally but our voices and our activities can make us part of the solution. Silence and inaction are therefore not an option.

Christine Blower, NUT International Secretary

Taking the local authority out of education: a cautionary tale



In 2008, I left the brutal world of further education (FE), where I had spent the bulk of my working life, for the calmer waters of Ilford County High School. This 'brutality' emanated, of course, not from the students, who were generally appreciative of any genuine attempt to help them and thus mostly a joy to teach, but from the 'Stalinist' management culture which had by then firmly taken root throughout the sector.

Not that FE was always such a hostile place in which to work. Back in the mid-1970s, when I first started out, fresh from university as a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed young lecturer in economics, it was very much the place to be and a place to which many a secondary school teacher aspired, not without good reason. A wonderful document, called the Silver Book (FE's equivalent of the Burgundy Book) stipulated national conditions of pay and service to which all colleges had to adhere, and which ensured attractive annual holidays (more generous than in schools) and maximum limits on teaching hours, amongst many other things.

Towards the Market Approach to Education

But, come the early 1990's, all this was to end: a Tory government, still on a high over its defeat of the miners, discovered a hitherto unnoticed group of workers - the college lecturers who, horror of horrors, seemed to be enjoying decent pay and conditions of service. At the dawn of the age of 'internal markets' and the belief that direct local authority control of FE had led to unresponsive, inefficient, monopoly suppliers, this clearly would not do.

So, come 1993, local authority control was removed and each college was given corporate status – providers of further education would now manage their own budgets and would be forced to respond to the wishes of their 'customers' as their funding would be directly determined by the numbers 'signed up', with the competition between rival providers bringing about greater efficiency.

Results of the Market Approach

The reality, however, turned out to be somewhat different. The very first thing to happen in college after college was that principals re-designated themselves as 'chief executives' and promptly awarded themselves, and their ever-expanding army of assorted top managers, eye-watering pay increases and perks such as company cars and lavishly furnished executive suites. With priorities firmly established, and with NATFHE unable to stem the tide, the CEOs' next task was to sort out the lecturers by getting them onto more 'flexible', 'professional' contracts and to kick out the Silver Book completely.

What followed in subsequent years throughout the sector was excruciatingly painful for the front-line troops who did the teaching: no nationally agreed conditions of pay and service; widespread casualisation; holiday times slashed, often in half; substantially increased teaching loads, sometimes with no weekly limits; hand-picked, largely unaccountable, undemocratic governing bodies; publicly-funded institutions crawling with private sector 'consultants'; an obsession with 'quality assurance' and ever-greater levels of bureaucracy. And, all the while, executive salaries and perks continued inexorably on their upward path, as did cases of financial mismanagement and corporate corruption.

So, what a good idea it is that schools should now also be able to 'take control' of their own affairs and free themselves from the 'dead hand' of the local authority. Do you know what? Somehow, I don't think so!

Henry Tiller

You`re Never too Old to Learn



Retirement meant I could go to the other side of the desk and become a learner! After more than three decades that would be refreshing!

From archery to Zen, the choice of activities at the local adult education centre was bewildering. Eventually I decided on a balanced timetable of the intellectual and the aesthetic. How ambitious that sounds! We'll see....

History

History, yes, I liked that at school, I'll try that. Revolutions, both industrial and political, seemed to be a good way to begin looking at the 18th century. Martin, the lecturer, was a reassuring traditional figure but his chalk and talk approach had me yawning and my attention wandered and I was soon studying my classmates instead of Robert Walpole. Beatrice, still a radical leftie, was extremely well-read and asked incisive questions, leaving Martin gaping and speechless. In the tea break he gently took her aside and nervously appealed to her not to disrupt the class. Needless to say, she didn't change the habit of a lifetime and Martin still trembles at the start of a new term.

Poetry

Poetry was my next choice. It's been a long time since O level, but isn't it something about iambic pentameters? Alas, my wish to be able to scan the verses of the great poets was not granted. I found myself amongst other pensioners who would be poets, some of whom wrote pages of blank verse about their lives. It was like listening in at the psychiatrist's. 'Neville, what do you have to share with us?' The poetry class came to be a cathartic offloading and Neville felt so much better after reciting his vitriolic words on the qualities of his ex-wife. Some of us knew her but didn't tell and listened with lowered eyes.

Art

I was always able to draw and the Art class promised to improve my printmaking skills. Warren, who was a 'real' artist, showed us his wondrous images of barges in dappled shade, bobbing on the rippling canal waters. Sharp tool in hand, gouging out the lino and stabbing my hand, my picture gradually emerged. The printmaking process involved inking, rolling and pressing and my classmates proudly peeled off their prints and held them up for inspection. In embarrassed shame, mine were crumpled in bloodstained hands into my lap. Any skills I might have possessed had surely dissipated long ago?

Eureka

It was clear that I needed to find something different and new to really engage me. By chance I did find a course that seemed to touch on several subjects, like cutting a slice of interdisciplinary cake. A W.E.A. course, 'Themes in Archaeology' required me not only to look at objects in a historical sense but also to examine the stuff they were made of as well as the artistry and style used by the maker. I found myself trying to recall long ago lessons on soil, rocks, and climate. Was it animal, vegetable or mineral I pondered. Bone, burnt wood or iron ore? I was like a detective looking for clues that went both back in time and down into the archaeologist's trench.

It's clear that Adult Education gives us the chance to learn but I have found it pays to have the courage to try something different. For me, it's enabled the fascinating discovery of a new way of looking at the world and a means to find out some uncomfortable truths about myself. **VP**

Book Review: 'Standing Up for Education' eds., Unterraner T. Regen L., 2016

The book 'Stand up for Education' comprises a series of articles written by people from all parts of the education field, including students, teachers, lecturers, head teachers, union leaders, education workers and many others. We are treated also to some international research and international perspectives from those who have worked or studied overseas.

The book starts with a historical perspective from the 70s, with Christine Blower (former General Secretary of the NUT) recalling her early experiences in Holland Park School and continues with educators and others talking about the increase in academisation and the newer multi-academy trusts.

In one early chapter, Jeremy Corbyn focuses on child poverty, with other contributors, such as Kevin Courtney, emphasising the impact of poor parenting, high employment, poor housing and local services on teachers and schools.

A Lancaster head teacher's article provides the back story to the Government's policies and how they have affected schools, especially in causing many teachers to leave the profession in unprecedented numbers. Other chapters focus on the narrowing of the curriculum, the pernicious impact of Ofsted and the trend towards academisation.

International analysis is used to show that even though children start school earlier in the UK, their results are not as good as children from elsewhere. Teachers also work harder than their colleagues overseas. A young teacher recently told me that even as a rep she cannot go to NUT meetings after school because she would miss seeing her kids before their bedtime.

This book presents a lot of informative and relevant material about the current and past state of education and seeks to look at possible future developments. Certainly, its authors make a very positive contribution to the Stand Up for Education campaign.

Barbara Roy-Macauley (Redbridge teacher from 2005 to 2011.)

Geffrey Museum Visit

The Geffrey Museum in Hoxton – a family favourite – is based around the original 18th century almshouses which have been tastefully extended to provide extra exhibition space, educational facilities (well-used the day we visited) and a pleasant café overlooking a small garden.

Our visit was at the end of November and the 'rooms', arranged chronologically over recent decades and previous centuries, were decked out for a family Christmas. We chose to work our way backwards through the ages, beginning with our own experience of our childhood homes and those of our grandparents.

It was easy to recognise how many styles of living survive beyond the period to which they originally belonged – furniture and objects that are kept and handed down through the generations and through evolving customs and lifestyles. The cycle of pared-down functional interiors alternating with those crammed with every conceivable ornament and drapery was fascinating, reflected in an increased desire for comfort just as much as in the need to get rid of clutter.

A modest-sized but well-stocked picture-gallery displays a variety of portraits and domestic scenes from different periods. A further section devoted to the history of the area around the museum indicates the gradual development of commercial manufacturing – at both artisan and factory levels – domestic patterns, and building styles and usages of increasing sophistication. It is interesting to see how living became separated from working at a relatively recent time. The museum is well worth a visit, with and without children!

Liz Dolan

News Flash: The NUT and ATL unions have decided to form a new 'super-union' with nearly half a million members. Members of both organisations have voted to join forces and create the National Education Union.