

REDBRIDGE NUT RETIRED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2012

Issue 2

REDBRIDGE NUT RETIRED TEACHERS' SPRING MEETING



Picture courtesy of "Ilford Recorder"

A solid core of interested retired teachers welcomed Bernard Regan, who has been a National Executive member for Inner London and now serves on the Retired Teachers' Advisory Committee, to a meeting on March 15th 2012, held at Ilford County High School, and listened to a clear outline of the current position on teachers' pensions, together with a detailed account of the various actions and decisions which have led to the situation in which we now find ourselves.

Several key points emerged:

- The government has pressed ahead with the imposition of new measures, which will ensure that teachers will work for a longer term of years, pay higher contributions, and receive smaller pensions, in spite of the fact that it has been shown that the teachers' pension scheme is in balance and is affordable; no real assessment of the costs of any changes to the scheme has yet been made.
- It is vital that the TP scheme should be considered in conjunction with state pensions, not separately: the change from RPI to CPI when calculating increases affects both, as do decisions about taxation and age-related eligibility.
- There is a risk that young teachers, burdened by repayment of student loans and university tuition fees, and keen to take out mortgages or support a family, may opt out of the TP scheme because they perceive contributions to be beyond their means.
- Campaigning on the issue of public sector pensions should go hand in hand with a campaign for private pensions to be brought up to a similar level; all pensioners deserve an adequate reward for their years of service and an opportunity to continue to lead a fulfilling life.
- It is thought that pensions based on a career average, rather than a final salary, is likely to disadvantage women.
- The NUT is still in negotiations with the Government in respect of the offer made on 19.12.11 and is continuing discussions with other unions. The priority issues are seen as the age at which a pension becomes payable, and the increase in employee contributions.
 - The NUT executive decision is to hold a series of regionally-based actions, beginning with a march and rally in central London, which took place on March 28th.

The talk was followed by a lively and thought-provoking discussion: it is clear that feelings still run high even when teachers are no longer at the chalk-face! Retired members of the profession were urged to remain involved and make use of their experience, at whatever level is individually appropriate, in the fight for an adequately-supported old age, which above all means alerting young teachers to the fact that this will be their future too. Opting out is definitely not an option.

Liz Dolan

THE ALL LONDON RETIRED TEACHERS GROUP

For many London teachers retirement means that they can take the opportunity to sell up, realize their "equity" and move to greener, more pleasing places to live. This loss of retired union members has meant that for many divisions establishing and maintaining a retired teachers section is, and has been, very difficult. As a result Bernard Regan and I, who are two of the London members on the Retired Teachers Advisory committee, decided that we should establish an All London Retired Teachers Group. In some cases this has replaced defunct Retired Teachers sections, whilst for other divisions it complements their existing sections.

Regional Council and Regional Office were very happy for this to happen and have given us support with finding venues and providing communications with secretaries and divisions.

Whereas Retired members groups used to be based largely on social activities, we wanted to provide meetings for retired members to discuss union matters as well as wider political questions. For all of us who are retired, the huge changes in the nature of the NUT since we first started teaching are very clear. Being a teacher in the sixties still involved working with large numbers of people who considered themselves to be members of "a profession". The union was still not affiliated to the TUC and there was a circumspection about dealing with issues considered to be political. I still recall my first attempt to get a resolution debated in our association on racism and it being ruled out of order because there was an implication that whilst some teachers may be racist, many were still teaching with no thought of the racist underpinnings of material being used in the classrooms.

If we compare the debates that union members now accept as bread and butter issues for the union, as well as the determination shown in being prepared to fight in defence of pensions and conditions, there has been a huge change over the last 40 years. Obviously, pay campaigns in the past were militant but it was through those campaigns that teachers increasingly saw themselves as workers. (For some this was similar to the proletarianisation of the white collar worker.) Recognising this and all the issues about how and what we teach, there has been an increasing identification with struggles of other workers – whether here in Britain or abroad.

In this context we wanted to make the All London meetings relevant to a layer of union members who had been active in their divisions and associations getting

executive members and div secs to report on union actions both nationally and locally. But we have also had speakers from wider campaigns; from the National Pensioners Convention, Save the NHS campaign, and PSC. We have recently had Melissa Benn to speak about the crisis in education, John Yandell from the Institute to speak about the crisis in Higher Education and Liz Fekete from the Institute of Race Relations talking on the riots.

We meet from 11.00 am to 1.00pm about every six weeks close to Hamilton House. Over the last three years we have established a very interesting body of members, who have obviously become very committed to the group. We do want to be open to other activities and have for a couple of years organized a coach to the Burston celebrations the first Sunday in September. We hope to be able to do the same this year.

We always welcome new members and if you cannot come but would like to be kept informed of the meetings (or if you know of others who would like to come) contact me, Jane Shallice at janeshal@globalnet.co.uk.
Jane Shallice

SUMMER MEETING AND AGM OF RRTA

You are invited to attend the above meeting to socialise, hear John Yandell of the Institute of Education speak on some current educational issues and participate in the Association's AGM.

Date - Thursday 5th. July

Venue - Gants Hill Methodist Church

Time - 2.30 - 4.30pm

Please contact Bob Archer on 07956 656 086 or email bobarcher46@btinternet.com to confirm attendance

Current members of the RRTA Committee

Bob Archer - Committee member

Liz Dolan - Chair

Bill Harrison - Treasurer

Lydia Kirby - Secretary

Mike Peters - Communications Officer

Field-Trip Horrors: memories of a retired Geography teacher

I taught Geography, mainly in Redbridge secondary schools for 35 years. Fieldwork is an aspect of the subject that demands the utmost thought and preparation to ensure its success. HOWEVER, I SOON LEARNT THAT DESPITE EVERY EFFORT, THE UNEXPECTED CAN AND DOES HAPPEN .

- A Yr. 7 girl on a farm visit, flapping her hands around a donkey's face. The result- a bite on her arm and an emergency dash to the doctor for a tetanus jab.
- A Yr. 8 boy who falls face down into a mud slick and is covered from head to foot in a thick brown coating. We rolled him about in a river to get it off.
- The Yr. 9 boy who decides to play 'jumping in cow-pats' and can not understand why the coach-driver would not allow him back on the bus and why we insist that HE cleaned his own boots.

On a visit to Fairholme Plain and Hainault Forest Park two Yr.8 boys decided to spice up things by devising their own field-study exercise. The early part of the day had involved sixty kids carrying out exercises under close supervision but by 2.00 pm we had reached Hainault Forest. It was at this stage that the two boys took out their blue plastic arrows, which they had obtained earlier, and started their pre-arranged caper. The first boy took himself off and stuck the arrows onto trees, setting up his trail, and sometime after, the second one took off to try to find him. The result of this "orienteering" exercise was that the two got themselves hopelessly lost.

When we got back to the double-decker bus, parked opposite the pub on the other side of Hainault Forest, only fifty-eight kids were present. On arrival back at School the police were alerted. Meanwhile the orienteering duo had got into a panic and had cut off across farmland to emerge at Collier Row about 4.40 p.m, desperately trying to find the group. KIDS!!!!!!!

Anne Davies

Seniors Speak Up: the Redbridge Pensioners` Forum

I began attending meetings of the Redbridge Pensioners` Forum in March, in order to help create a link between retired teachers and other "mature citizens" in Redbridge. From the beginning, I have felt very warmly welcomed and am beginning to recognize some faces from among the large and disparate group who attend regularly. The Forum meets twice a month for general business and for a short talk from a wide variety of visiting (or home-grown) speakers. A recent selection of talks includes an account of riding a donkey down into the Grand Canyon - a hair-raising experience - a view of looking for work in London after a childhood spent in the Caribbean and some anecdotes from a former hotel chef. Additionally, there was a "hustings" meeting, at which local candidates for the Greater London Authority elections this May, defended their parties' policies against a barrage of pertinent and forcefully delivered questions from the floor. There is also an active social programme of outings to places of interest and regular occasions for general socialising.

In fact the Forum exists as much as anything as a campaigning pressure group to ensure that the day-to-day needs of older people are met, specifically in Redbridge, but also in the wider context of London and the rest of the country. Thus issues raised, have included, at a local level, the question of crime protection and general security, the preservation of local hospitals and ready access to doctors' surgeries as well as pressure on the Council to provide housing which is already suitable or can be easily adapted to enable older people to maintain their independence in their own homes for as long as possible. At a national level, the changes to the NHS, and their implications for social care, are at the forefront of people's minds. Pensioners have very strong views, which they are not afraid to voice, nor do they hesitate to point out that they make up a significant proportion of adults eligible to vote. Members of Parliament neglect this fact at their peril.

Liz Dolan

NUT SPRING CONFERENCE

**You can find the inside story on the Redbridge Teachers` Association Facebook page,
<http://www.facebook.com/groups/134132089931981/>**

REDBRIDGE EDUCATION NEWS

Redbridge parents of gifted children are angry at the decision of two new academies, the King Edward VI Grammar School and Chelmsford County High School, to exclude pupils who live outside their catchment areas.

Glasbury House, Redbridge's outdoor education centre on the banks of the River Wye, has been given a last-minute reprieve after funding for the next three years was found. An appeal to schools for a £1000 annual donation, an identified under-spending in the Council's budget and plans to increase the Centre's income, mean that its future has been secured. Cllr Nolan, the cabinet member for leisure, described the facility as 'irreplaceable'. But the Labour group, which supported the rescue, said the 'last-minute deal' was 'shambolic'.

The NUT's one-day London strike on March 28th. closed eight primary schools in the Borough and partially-closed a majority of secondary schools. Paddy Marshall, Regional Officer of the NUT, said: 'Teachers are being told to work longer, pay more and get less from their pensions. The only thing we can do is to take action.'

Several existing Redbridge schools will be expanded and new schools created to accommodate an increasing demand for places. Amongst those scheduled for expansion are Grove Primary, Mayespark Primary, Chadwell Heath and Mayfield, which will increase its roll by 840 to 2400. The Isaac Newton Academy will open in September, making available an extra 180 places. The number of pupils studying in Redbridge schools is projected to rise to 41,561 in September 2012.

Teaching Assistants made redundant at Woodlands Primary School were supported by 100 teachers and parents in a demonstration against the action. Gahazala Navabd, a former parent support adviser at the school, said: 'Fourteen people have been made redundant.'

Review: School Wars by Melissa Benn

In her new book, School Wars, Melissa Benn marshals a formidable array of information, coupled with well-reasoned arguments, to make the case for a truly comprehensive system of state-provided education for all children, based on the idea of a neighbourhood secondary school supported by a network of local feeder primary schools.

With impeccable Labour Party credentials and herself state-educated at one of London's earliest flagship comprehensive schools, Melissa Benn nevertheless does not shrink from identifying those Labour Government decisions about state education which have, at various times, marred the ideal and paved the way for what can only be seen as the chaos of the current Coalition Government's approach, with its academies (a Labour invention somewhat traduced), free schools, faith schools (another Labour initiative given impetus by the free school movement) and a flourishing fee-paying sector.

Benn makes clear that this is an agenda which, through its insistence on testing and an ever more restricted and utilitarian curriculum in LEA schools in contrast to the relaxation of controls in other schools, can only serve to widen the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. This trend is exacerbated by the policy of encouraging "sponsorship" from private companies (profit-making in their other interests) to fund non-LEA schools; it does not take much imagination to realise that such sponsors will eventually wish to influence curriculum content and decisions about the pay and conditions of teachers.

Melissa Benn gives a coherent and absorbing account of the development of state education since the 1944 Education Act, pointing out the instances where idealism was allowed to give way to pragmatism or vested interest, and also the extent to which political expediency has often been seen as having a higher priority than the needs of children. She identifies the long history of ignoring research and repressing school-based innovation,.

Few could fail to be moved by her impassioned but lucid call for an informed and measured reappraisal of what education is for and how we can best pick up the pieces that remain and so effectively equip all our children for their and the world's future.

Liz Dolan

Newsletter Submissions

Please send all articles, or suggestions for articles, to

Mike Peters - mikepeters1@ntlworld.com

Thank you