



WANSTEAD TEA PARTY A SUCCESS

One morning in mid-March a dozen retired NUT teachers from Redbridge met informally at "Belgique", a classy coffee shop and restaurant five minutes walk from Wanstead Station, for coffee and cakes.

Conversation flowed freely and ranged widely, including discussion on the crime novels of Stig Larson, P.D.James, Peter May and Henning Mankell; political issues of the day; local educational matters and the proposed strike action by the NUT.

Some of us indulged ourselves on cream cakes, lime tarts and other delights in the pleasant atmosphere at the rear of the restaurant.

There was no strict timetable: members came and went over a period of an hour and a half. Some were old friends, others were meeting for the first time.

The event was judged a success and members felt it would be worth repeating it at regular intervals, alongside any other activities we organize.

I hope that those who enjoyed it might encourage other retired NUT members to join us next time.

Bill Harrison

Schooling Around the World: One Guyanese Expat Reflects



Guyana, formerly known as British Guyana, is often referred to as "the land of many waters" because of its many rivers and waterways. As a vast country, the country spans an area of 83,000 square miles and is divided into three counties - Essequibo - the largest, Demerara and Berbice. Most of the population live along the coastal region. Over the years, travel over land and rivers, has become easier because of mechanisation.

Guyanese Society

To understand the type of education I received in Guyana in the 1950s and 60s, one must be very aware of the kind of society which existed at that time and before I was born. Guyana was a country which was colonised lastly by the British, and where skin colour and access to money and wealth, helped determine one's status. (The lighter-skinned individual was more likely to be favoured by the white plantation master, which helped set the scene for Guyana to be stratified and divided according to racial groupings and parentage.)

Over time, different groups of migrants made Guyana a land of six peoples – the indigenous Arawaks and Caribs were the first to settle, especially in the hinterland; Africans were shipped as slaves for plantations; the East Indians came from India as indentured servants after Emancipation; the Chinese (who in travelling to the West Indies) came as labourers, followed by the Portuguese and other Europeans. Guyana was therefore truly a melting-pot.

Education System

Racism and prejudice, a class system, distinctions according to skin-colour, money, wealth, privilege and even the region in which one was born, all affected the education received. The most prestigious schools and widest choice of high schools were found in Georgetown. Former colonial masters sanctioned an education system which, though free of charge to a certain level, was inferior to that in Britain. And so my peers and I sat the National School Leaving Exam at 12 or 13 if we were successful in all our class exams; then we went on to take the College of Preceptors. But these exams were also second best, and in his book *A History of the Guyanese Working People 1881-1905*, Walter Rodney chronicles the struggles of many well-educated and privileged Guyanese who fought to raise standards. During my years of schooling, money, privilege and status worked for some families, enabling some children to be fortunate enough to succeed at Common Entrance or 11+. This

guaranteed a place at one of the prestigious Georgetown secondary schools. Some High Schools were run by churches and some were privately owned. By the '60s secondary schools were offering Science subjects, and increasingly there was greater access to the exact O' Level exams offered in classrooms in Britain.

Growing Up

One of the beautiful things about growing up back then was the simplicity of life and the lack of awareness of how complex our country was. I remember my peers and I craving knowledge and simply relishing learning. This generated such excitement as Guyana opened up and we caught glimpses of an exciting and vast world beyond our shores. Guyanese children loved books and educating themselves, though many had to start their day at 4am in order to travel to Georgetown or elsewhere to their secondary school. The sacrifice was enormous for both student and family, and especially for those who journeyed from far away villages.

My reflection cannot omit four important factors which influenced the education I received: firstly, the foundation laid in kindergarten. Most were privately owned and staffed by teachers who had high aspirations. So, the Head of my village kindergarten, for example, knew my family well and visited my home to insist I avoided less-achieving pupils and their families, even in out- of- school hours. Secondly, the government's vaccination programme gave us access to MMR and later TB jabs; these were compulsory and you could not start school without them. Thirdly, there was concern about our diet and so all received overseas donor agency supplements of milk, high nutrition biscuits and cod-liver oil tablets daily. Fourthly, the yearly inter-school sports within and between the three counties, the singing competitions, and the reciting of poetry by Guyana and Caribbean scholars, meant that our teachers instilled a great sense of pride in us. It is true to say that our achievements and aspirations stood us in good stead when hundreds migrated to countries like Canada, the USA and Britain.

Over the years, Guyanese society has been changing and the WHO (World Health Organisation) and other organisations carry reports of concern. There is a harsh subjugation of minority groups under the current dominant Indian government. But many Guyanese expats still return home time and again to the Motherland to give back some of the benefits received in those long ago days.

Lydia Kirby

Pension Alert! Check your pension details online

Teachers' Pensions has a revamped website at <https://www.teacherspensions.co.uk/>. If you register, you can check your Employment History. I did - and found 7 months missing in the middle of a long-term contract. If you find time missing, contact your employer payroll officer, and they will correct the error with Teachers Pensions, who will then recalculate. TP will only accept the information from the employer but they can give you the contact details you need. It's worth checking to see if your employment history is correct.

Lorraine Dawes



Ken Loach`s New Film

When they announced the White Paper on the radio, Grandad threw my brother in the air in joy. He would be going to secondary school!

My dad, born a year or so after the Atlee government was elected, often shares this anecdote with me. For his generation the Welfare State was a new and exciting thing that paved the way for many opportunities. For my Grandad's generation it was so much more: it was the possibility that their children would never see poverty and destruction like they had. I often share this story with students when we read *An Inspector Calls*, J.B. Priestly's 1946 theatrical masterpiece. There was a time when there was no health care, no assurance of schooling. If you were poor you lived in slums (real slums) and nothing was cradle to the grave. Ken Loach's documentary explores the many personal stories - many much like my Grandad's. It must reach audiences of my age and younger if it is to complete its necessary task: to galvanize millions to fight to keep it.

The Spirit of 45 is a love letter to the 1945 establishment of the Welfare State. It very much uses an oral history model for piecing together the development of the Bill politically, but also to show just how necessary it was.

Starting in the 1930s and ending up in the late 1980s, Loach takes on the gargantuan task of telling the story of how the welfare State started to how it is beginning to be finished off.

The director carefully illustrates just how poor the 1930s were through pictures, footage and interviews with those who remember the decade. Descriptions of sleeping in beds that were "crawling" with vermin in the Liverpool slums, remind members of the audience, who have never known anything but the Welfare State, just how destitute conditions were. Loach clearly wanted to demonstrate the importance of the experience for those who had lived through such poverty, the Second world war and then the establishment of the Welfare State. He does this successfully, and the recounts are genuinely moving. The descriptions of Welsh miners crying after the election of Atlee's Labour government and young doctors

Informing patients they will be seen are real tear-jerking memoirs. They ring true to the experience of many who lived through that period.

There is no doubt that Loach is a great filmmaker, but he slightly misses the mark in terms of narrative. The focus on the transition from no Welfare State to full Welfare State is a fair choice, but the story suddenly skips from 1951 to 1979, with the election of Thatcher. Indeed Thatcher hated the Welfare State, but major neo-liberal shifts in world economic views from the 1950s also had some part to play in the gradual dismantling of all that was glorious about the Welfare State ideal. The decision to incorporate so much history leaves Loach open to great criticism. When discussing the Welfare State in its early days (late 1940's) how can he have forgotten to include the immigrant voice? Furthermore, his interviews with female workers at the time barely go beyond nurses. He takes on a massive expanse of history with a slightly clunky narrative structure. Perhaps if he had focused on 1945-1951 he would have had a better second half to his movie, allowing more stories from more participants to come through.

Some of the criticism suggests that in *The Spirit of 45* Loach is presenting a rather long party political broadcast for a Labour Party long gone, but this is unfair. What Atlee's Labour government did was to make the lives of millions of people better, and establish a system that many felt was based on a common good. Indeed it lacked democratic control, indeed it was founded by the Labour Party and it was part of wider concessions across Europe post-war. However, to those that have lived through the poverty of the 1930s, the fact that it was set up at all was the glorious thing. Other critics have

have suggested the film is too nostalgic, but of course it is a history documentary, using the tradition of oral history, talking to those that saw it happen. Who wouldn't be nostalgic for a period of British history that saw such change?

The timing couldn't be better. Within days of its release, hundreds have signed up to Loach's call for a new party, which could be a very exciting turn in Left wing politics..

Rachel Archer (Young Teachers' Officer, Hackney Teachers' Ass.)

Education for Liberation – Conference Report

Education for Liberation magazine held a well-attended conference at Haverstock School in Camden on 9th. February this year. Discussion in the morning session was dominated by a critique of the new primary national curriculum. One workshop was led by educationalist, Terry Wrigley, who worked over some of the material from his forthcoming book, *Living on the Edge*. Another was led by a group of local parents, who had helped lead the campaign against forced academisation at Downhills Primary School in Haringey. In a later session, NUT executive member, Alex Kenny, said that it was a growing public consensus that had forced Gove to back down over plans to scrap GCSEs and introduce a new baccalaureate examination. NUT General Secretary, Christine Blower, and former children's laureate, Michael Rosen, addressed the final session of the conference.

Bob Archer

Children in Care - Book Review

Notice Me! - a Barnardo child's scrapbook of memories: 1946-1961, Suzi Hamilton, Melrose Books 2012, ISBN: 978-1 9077 32- 81-2

Suzi Hamilton was born in April 1945 to an English mother and an African- American father, who had served in the armed forces during World War II. A 'bulge baby' born out of wedlock to a married woman whose husband had been serving in the army, Suzi was placed for adoption but given the surname of the birth mother. In 1995 when Dr Barnardo's 'opened their files', Suzi placed a request to be given access to her records. This book, which Suzi calls a scrapbook, is an attempt to write an autobiography of her early years living 'in care'.

This book is Suzi's first, and it is aimed at those who may have had a similar background of being in care, adopted, or long-term fostered. It explains some of the social history of the 40s and 50s, either for those who shared it or would like to find out more about it at a personal level. And for a social worker, who is researching the social care history of the Barnardo's estate, it offers an accurate factual historical perspective, with photographic plates of different buildings etc.

The author aims to explain how a war-baby of mixed heritage was able to find out about her roots and was able to develop a mixed race identity whilst she was in the care of Dr. Barnardo's children's home from 1946-1961. She describes the reasons for going into care, what evidence was made available through the *Making connections Department* at Barnardo's and the many childhood experiences of inclusion, rejection, and growing racial consciousness. Short extracts and poems underline how Suzi developed her self-concept, suggesting it was due to both deliberate actions and unwitting omissions.

I think that the material is well put together and has credibility because it is so factually based. The book is also successful as it includes different forms of writing - poems, songs, factual documents and reflections on real events. It is possible to dip into different aspects of the content but to get a clear overview of her life, you need to start at the beginning as Suzi takes the reader through the early stages of her life, including her childhood memories of early illnesses and medical treatments.

I think *Notice Me* will be a quick read (150 pages) and an easy read of major interest to other RRTA members. It explains how not having her own parents meant that Suzi was flooded with kindness from her carers but that they did not always positively support her development of a secure identity. This is illustrated, for example, by the changing of her name to Hamilton because she associated Plumb (her name at birth) with a lot of name calling and clearly she could not tolerate that. Subsequently, she changed it again to Widmark because he was her favourite actor and father-figure.

As Suzi may have had similar questions about her history as many of us, her book is likely to make a very interesting read.

Barbara Roymacauley

Newsletter Contributions Welcomed

The RRTA Newsletter always welcomes contributions that might be of interest to other members. Please send yours to either Mike Peters, 76 Rous Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex, IG9 6BT or to mikepeters1@ntlworld.com