



NEU Redbridge Retired Teachers' Newsletter Winter 2019

A Walk Around Fitzrovia



Ann Basu, author of *'Fitzrovia, the other side of Oxford Street'* led a small group of NEU members and friends around an area of Central London, bordered by Euston Road to the north, Tottenham Court Road to the east, Portland Place and Regent Street to the west and Oxford Street to the south: this was Fitzrovia.

Our walk began in the elegant Georgian Fitzroy Square, once home to James McNeill Whistler, George Bernard Shaw and Virginia Woolf, amongst others: more recently the Square and its buildings have been used as a film location for period dramas. In the early twentieth century The Jewish Lads' Clubs had their headquarters at 38 Fitzroy Square and were allowed to use it rent free by philanthropist Mrs Nathaniel Montefiore.

The former Middlesex Hospital in Fitzrovia, in pre-NHS days, ran as a charitable institution: today the developers are transforming the little of it that's left into flats for the sales and rental market. The façade of one building has been cleaned to reveal beautiful brick work and one of the conditions of the development was that the nearby former hospital chapel be preserved and restored to its former grandeur. The Grade II* listed Fitzrovia Chapel now reveals stunning mosaics, polychrome marble and memorial plaques to medical staff, some of whom died of typhus and scarlet fever. Never consecrated, it is a secular building and a present day venue for religious and civil ceremonies.

Mike Pentelow, editor of Fitzrovia News community newspaper, accompanied us on our walk and told us about the artists, musicians and literary and political figures who called Fitzrovia home. Bob Dylan played his first gig outside of the U. S. in the function room of the King and Queen pub in 1962. There was the scandal of Cleveland Street, which involved a brothel, 'aristocratic and prominent patrons' and Post Office Telegraph messenger boys. Charles Dickens' first London home was in Cleveland Street and it is thought *'the nearby Strand Union Workhouse may have been his inspiration for Oliver Twist'* (Fitzrovia News, 10th. June 2013).

Maureen Henderson

THE BIG INTERVIEW

Henry Tiller talks to the Redbridge NEU's new Joint Secretaries - Ben Morris and Venda Prekumar



1. Ben, could you tell us a little about your previous roles within the Redbridge NUT?

I was Membership secretary from 2015-18 and Assistant secretary in 2018-19. Before arriving in Redbridge in 2013, I was Joint Secretary of Sheffield NUT and a member of the Sheffield exec since 1995.

2. What led you to take on the role of joint secretary?

I wanted to take the union in the direction of putting a greater focus on supporting members by building strong organisations in schools.

3. What in particular do you think that you'll be able to bring to the job?

I have been a socialist all my adult life and with that comes a deep commitment to trade unionism. I care passionately about education and the need for a change in the direction of travel from government policies, which are driving so many teachers away from the profession and creating an epidemic of stress-related illness.

I have experience of dealing with regional office, of negotiations and organizing members collectively, of handling casework, of running ballots and, on some occasions, leading industrial action. I understand the importance of building alliances with parents, trade unions and political representatives wherever possible. I also understand that a strong union branch means a strong team and I want to pass my experience to a new generation.

4. What are the main changes that you've seen in teachers' conditions of service over the years?

The worst thing is the stress loaded on teachers, partly by workload but also by a high-stakes testing system and an accountability system which is based on fear.

We can add to this, the attacks on pensions, the break-up of national conditions by the spread of academisation, the cuts in real pay since 2010 and the cuts to school funding.

We should not just be talking about teachers either. Our union now represents many other education staff. Often they are taking the brunt of cuts and are underpaid and undervalued.

5. If you could wave a magic wand, what changes in teachers' conditions would you immediately implement?

Restore pensions. Restore all schools to local authority control. Improve funding. Restore teachers' pay. Abolish Ofsted. Abolish SATs. Abolish measures of success which narrow the curriculum to a small range of academic subjects. Introduce a 40-hour week, along with reduced class size, better SEND support and more PPA time. A London weighting that reflects London costs. That would be a start.

6. And, finally, how do you think the merger between the NUT and ATL into the new NEU will work?

Very well. It is working already. Everything which creates greater unity amongst education staff is a step forward.



1. Vanda, could you tell us a little about your previous roles within the Red-bridge NUT?

I was a school rep for about five years before I became Joint Secretary last year.

2. What led you to take on the role of joint secretary?

Because I had seen what a strong union group is able to achieve in my own school in the role of rep, I wanted to replicate this in other schools in the borough. I felt that in the role of secretary there was potential to make very positive changes in the borough through building strong union groups in schools.

3. What in particular do you think that you'll be able to bring to the job?

I have good people skills and am good at motivating people. I would like to use these skills to increase rep density in the borough and create a supportive network amongst activists, so everyone feels supported and strengthened through solidarity.

4. What are the main changes that you've seen in teachers' conditions of service?

Where to start?! I think Michael Gove's changes to education have been devastating and have directly impacted on educators' conditions of service. The most damaging I would say is the link between pay and appraisal - this has meant teachers are constantly having to jump through hoops in order to secure pay progression - this should not be the case.

5. If you could wave a magic wand, what changes in teachers' conditions would you immediately implement?

I would uncouple the link between pay and appraisal - this will take away one of the tools of a bullying management.

6. What do you think would be the best way forward to achieve these changes?

We need to raise the consciousness of our members - let them know that they are not powerless and we can achieve improvements and changes if we can be unified as a profession. The Union is the place for this and so we need to work hard to engage as many members as we possibly can through whatever means.

7. And, finally, how do you think the merger between the NUT and ATL into the new NEU will work?

It has worked. Our strength lies in numbers and I think it is excellent that we are now the biggest education union in Europe - this gives us a lot more clout.

**Christmas Social on Thursday December 12th at
Wanstead Belgique from 10.30 am.**

**Please come along to relax and chat with old and new friends. And
vote before or afterwards.**

Volunteering with the Roma



Walking past rose-hips on the Greenway in Newham inspired a story. The walker, an older person, remembered her grandmother using the rose-hips collected in the nearby Polish forest to make syrup. Recalling how her grandmother made it, she decided to do the same. Not only did she make many jars of the syrup but she made a short illustrated book about the process. The walker told the story to me while we were having our weekly get-together to give her practice in the use of English, especially speaking and listening as well as reading. The walker was a Roma person, whose first languages were Roma and Polish. I scribed the story, using her words and helped to produce the book - *Making Rosehip Syrup*.

Roma Support Group

The weekly get-togethers were made possible by the Roma Support Group. This Group has enabled me to have the privilege of being accepted into family homes and it acts as a bridge into the wider community. The Support Group was set up in 1998 by Roma individuals and is now based in Barking Road, Canning Town. Its mission is to empower the Roma Community and to raise awareness and understanding of the Roma. Acting as a volunteer, I have felt part of the Roma Support Group Team and have been able to use and develop my teaching experience. The staff and trustees have been joined by other colleagues, who have lost their roles as Roma, Gypsy and Traveller Officers through the local authority cut-backs.

What We Do

Over a period of eleven years, as well as working with adults, I have worked with younger Roma, often in their own homes, acting as a facilitator rather than a tutor or even a mentor. I have brought library books and read stories to primary age children and have played maths games as well as chess and draughts. With older children, I have attended meetings with the school or college and we have read stories together - for example, *David Copperfield*, *An Inspector Calls* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

In the case of one girl who was very reluctant to read or listen to a story, she responded very well to craft activities and then one magical day she offered to read a book! With a home-based student, we created a history of the Thames through using postcards and the making of a "Thames-line". While realising the need to be flexible in meeting the needs of the Roma families, I have enjoyed the opportunity the volunteering role has given me to be in control of what I have been able to offer. Perhaps, the frustrated teacher has been allowed to express himself!

The Roma Support Group website is excellent and shows volunteering opportunities, including those related to the Aspiration Project, of which I am part. Check out - www.romasupportgroup.org.uk if you may be interested in joining us.

Jeremy O`Callaghan

Redbridge NEU News

Forty people attended the Redbridge NEU District General Meeting on 12th November. The agenda included a rousing presentation and discussion about SEND, followed by proposals for Conference motions. These focused on Exclusions, SEND, SRE and LGBT+ inclusive education, Academies, Climate Emergency, and Pedagogy. All six motions were carried. It was good to see a number of new, younger faces keen to carry on the work of campaigning on educational issues.

Liz Dolan, Retired Members' Officer