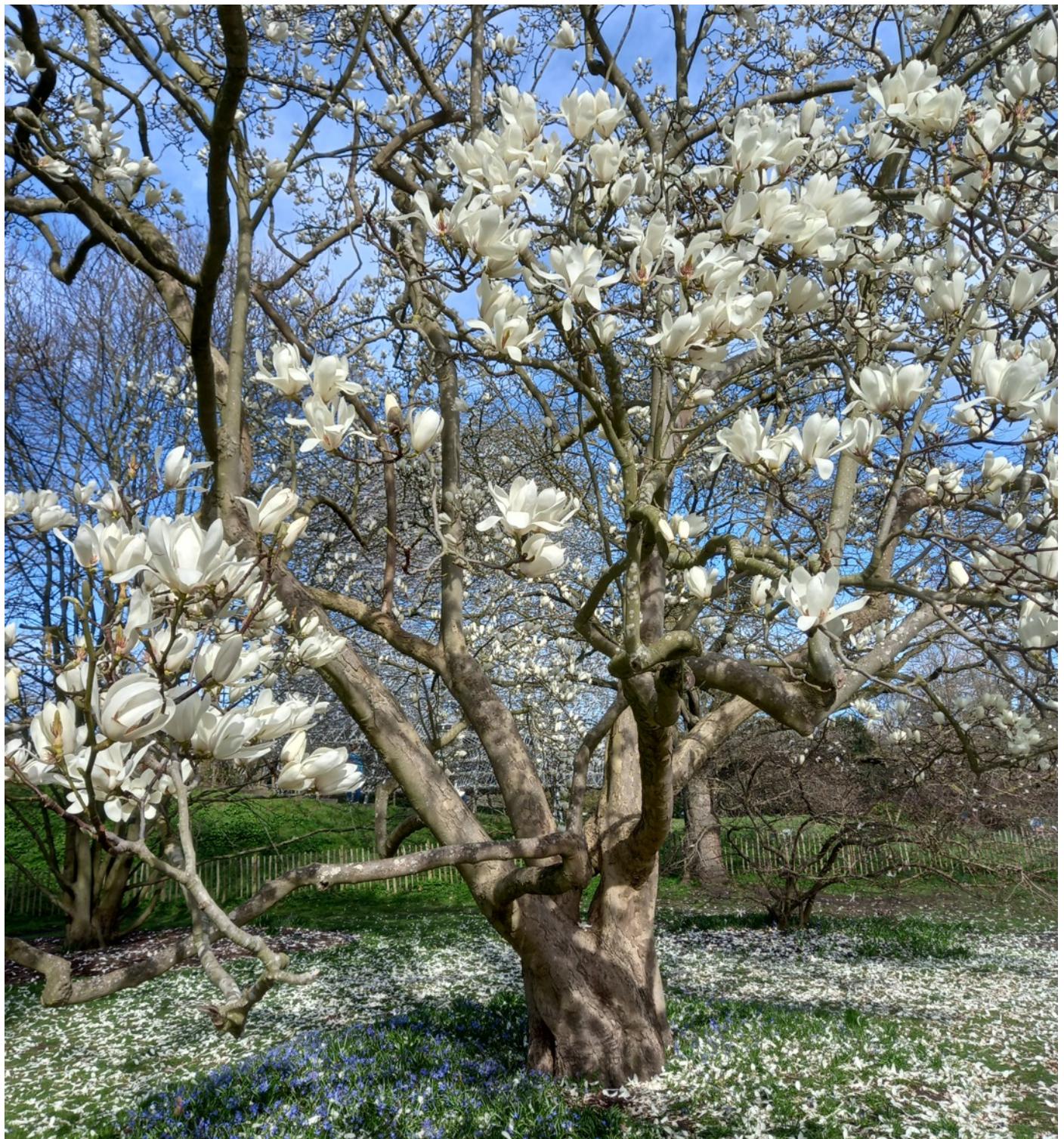


# The *Redbridge Newsletter*

*produced by retired members in Redbridge to  
share with colleagues across London*

Spring 2022





*Liz Floyd (above and on front page) has once more captured the spirit of the season. Our Newsletter is very keen to share retired educators' photographs as well as your letters and articles about the things that interest you*

## Inside this issue

- P.3: Ducking and diving at Lea Valley Park - *Nigel May***
- P.5: Talking about books - *Liz Dolan***
- P.7: Sudan teachers start national strike - *Miriam Scharf and Bob Archer***
- P.8: Dementia: Care in the Community - *A retired teacher***
- P.9: Caroline Playne, peace campaigner - *Jo Buchanan***
- P.11: Teaching climate change: a proposal - *Richard Hatcher***
- P.12: NEU in action in east London - *photo round-up***
- P.14: Levelling up: some key issues - *Carole Regan***
- P.15: London teachers march saying 'Workers deserve a pay rise'**
- P.16: Kicking misogyny out of football - *Jane Shallice***
- P.18: Hidden histories - *Henry Tiller***

*Redbridge Newsletter* is produced once a term by retired educators (mainly but not solely NEU members) in the London Borough of Redbridge. We welcome contributions from all retired - and in-service - educators. Our editor, Mike Peters, looks forward to receiving your letters, articles photographs and comments at [mike321peters@gmail.com](mailto:mike321peters@gmail.com)



# Ducking and diving at Lea Valley Park

Probably not one of the more scenic locations I visit. There to the west loom the silver stacks of Rye House gas power station, there's a roar of sound from the putative future Lewis Hamiltons careering around the Rye House track, the burnt hydrocarbons mingle with the sweetish tang of Rye Meads Sewage treatment works and steel pylons carry humming lines across the site. Of more historic interest are the ruins to the east of Netherhall Priory. This is the Glen Faba pit, a remnant of the insatiable demands of London's building boom, and the Netherhall area of Lea Valley Park, bounded by the Stort Navigation to the N, the Lea Flood Relief Channel to the W and Dobbs Weir Road to the S.

## Observing the Birds

It's an overcast January day with a biting NW wind. I set up my tripod and telescope at my first viewpoint on the banks of the lake and methodically pan across the area in view – 1,2,4, 5 Coots – 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 Tufted Ducks. And there is the chestnut side of the appropriately named Shoveler - a duck with an especially large bill. A Cetti's warbler shouts from the undergrowth, while Redwings "tzeep" overhead. Cormorants hang their wings in the white-splashed weeping willow on the island. There's the rising whistle of a drake Wigeon's call and Great Crested Grebes dive in pursuit of small fish. Near the end of my circuit, I notice the long-winged silhouettes and indented tails of two Red Kites - now increasingly common, having been reintroduced into several areas of the UK in the 90s.

## Volunteer Surveying

This is the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) which is supervised by the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology).



***Nigel May dressed for birdwatching***

Every month on a specified date, volunteer counters like myself visit wetland sites all over the country, from small ponds to lakes, marshlands, coastal mudflats and estuaries. This provides vital data that is essential for effective conservation and in providing evidence of the value of sites that may otherwise be under threat. I have counted this site since about 2005. It is always fascinating to note the changes through the seasons, to see the other wildlife and flowers that occur and to note the longer-term changes - unfortunately not all positive. Turtle Doves, Yellowhammers and Linnets have disappeared as breeding species. Some species come and go in response to changes in how the site was used. When there were still some active gravel workings at the south end of the site by Dobbs Weir Road, there were a couple of pairs of Little Ringed Plovers nesting. Cetti's Warblers



***'Probably not one of the more scenic locations': Lea Valley Park and the silver stacks of Rye Valley power station***

and Little Egrets have moved in. Occasionally, the odd, rare bird will turn up. I have occasionally recorded Goosander, Smew and Pintail ducks, which are less frequent here. A Red-necked Grebe was a surprise, as was an Arctic Tern, a pair of Barn Owls flitting about in daylight and a Hobby. The rarest seen was a very smart male Ferruginous Duck.

- Anyone with basically competent bird identification skills may volunteer as a WeBS counter, even on very small waterbodies like a local pond.

- The Lea Valley Park was established in the post-WW2 period as part of the Abercrombie Plan, principally as a leisure space and a 'green lung' for N & E London.

*Equipment used – (top right) trusty Carl Zeiss 7x42 binoculars (so old they say “Made in W Germany”) and (bottom right) a lightweight Opticron telescope with 15-40x Zoom, plus (below) an Alwych all-weather notebook.*

## Nigel May



# Talking about books

Grace is an articulate nine-year old. We share a passion for books and have recently had some enjoyable conversations about some of her favourites. The books she selected from her growing collection represent her development as a reader; they are of increasing complexity and make ever greater demands, not just in style and language use, but in the concepts and the way these are presented.

## *Pumpkin Soup (Helen Cooper)*

“I very much remember this book. It was my favourite.” It is a picture book for the very young which deals with possession and loss, friendship and rivalry and the rhythm of family life where everything has its place and activities are carried out in a regular cycle. “The illustrations are detailed and amazing ... sort of freeze frame”, says Grace. She thinks such detail is necessary because “you don’t have imagination, your imagination hasn’t developed, you don’t know ...” She recognises that both in words and pictures “they all have their own thing that they do”. Her verdict on the book: “Nothing else needs to be said ... it’s so good”.

Grace sees illustrations as gradually becoming less central to her enjoyment. In some books “the words explain the pictures”, whereas in others “the pictures show what the words are describing”. She reckons “you need something to get your imagination going. It doesn’t matter what it is, just something to help. If I was making a book, I think I’d have a fair few more illustrations at the start than in the middle. You can focus more on the words as you get more into the middle.”

## *My Naughty Little Sister (Dorothy Edwards)*

A perennial favourite, she considers it “fairly easy ... this was the first one I read for myself. I have lots of them. I could get into it. I could read it. Fun to read... to see what she’s going to do next. A bit more challenging in Y1 but I can read them easily now. A new story for each chapter, but it still ... it sort of connects together. Some really funny things she says. It has some illustrations but not too many so you can still picture the characters. They show you the back of their heads, so you can picture their faces.”

Grace makes some general remarks about books in a series. She describes some in which “it carries on through the books to one last thing and it all comes together” and others in which each story is complete in itself: “it will bring things back but you could just

read one book”. Grace links the episodic chapters in *My Naughty Little Sister* with this. Commenting on stand-alone books: “Some books ... it makes it very obvious that that’s the end. You would know there wouldn’t be another one. It leaves you hanging but there isn’t another one, keeps you wondering, frustrating”. She has grasped that wanting to know what comes next, how characters will develop, is at the heart of enjoying any book.

## *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats (T.S. Eliot)*

A book that’s a stepping-stone towards more sophisticated reading. “I really love this book. I’ve read it loads of times. Macavity is my favourite. A fun way of telling ... it’s like you know them. This isn’t a book where you imagine. It’s all there. The illustrations ... you take what the cat looks like and you



**Grace reading**

picture what they are doing.” Of poems as a genre, she says “like a new thing, it’s fresh. They could all be songs … just the smart way it’s written … it keeps it going.” She tapped out the rhythm.

## ***Black Beauty (Anna Sewell)***

This is a 19C classic. "I read it this time last year during lockdown. I brought it into school every day. Special own category. I can't really fit it into a category. No illustrations. A good thing. I like it better. I picture them all. So many good things. I was determined to finish it. A fairly slow start, a bit confusing, but once you get into it ... I love the fact that it's a longer book; after 100 pages I couldn't stop. Much more exciting once you can understand a book and it all makes sense. The next chapter explains the last chapter. It's more challenging." She has worked out that "a bit confusing" episodes or remarks can be clarified by subsequent material.

## ***When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit (Judith Kerr)***

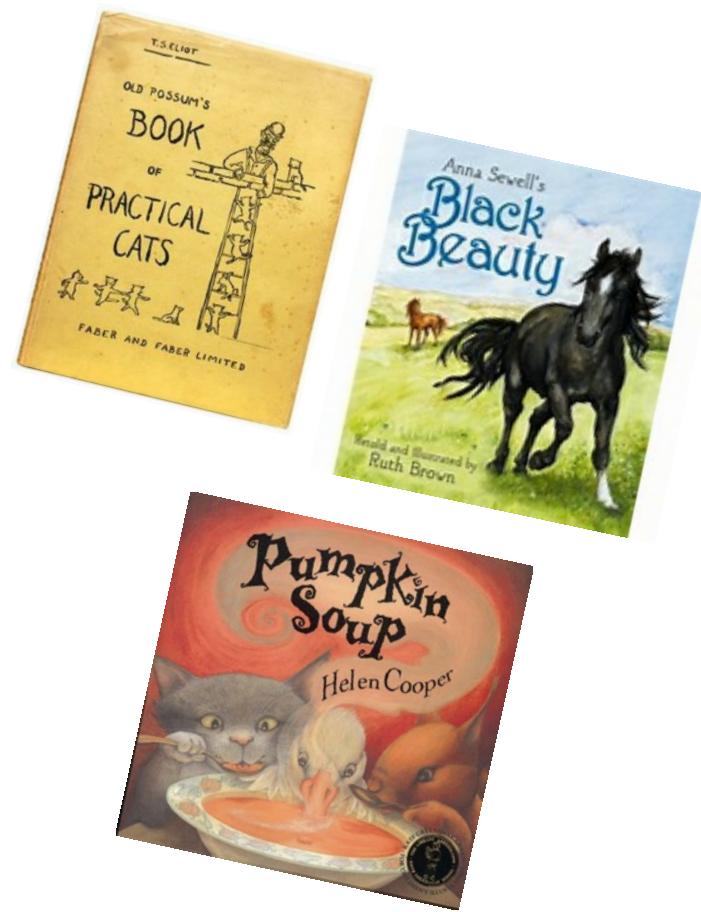
Kerr relates the experience of being a refugee as a child. The book stretches the young reader by presenting concepts encountered elsewhere – family life, loss, absence and new beginnings - in unfamiliar situations but in a language style which is familiar and accessible: “some just good writing”. Grace finds it “an amazing book, I’m more than half-way through. A real story, very shocking to read, it really happened. Some good stories but really explaining how she transitioned from Germany into another country. What she’s thinking at the time – scared, excited, enjoying it. Even though it’s a pretty serious story, there are a couple of funny bits. Anna talks about her family, what they do and how it changed them. Based on her own experiences ... from memory. People need to know about what happened. You want to know what happens, what they were like, how their reaction was to all this. Her parents didn’t tell her what was happening, where they were going.” Even half-way through, Grace is not sure which will be the final country and enjoys the suspense.

## A Child's View

It is all too easy to underestimate children's powers of analysis and their capacity to direct their own reading. Grace was often ahead of me in articulating the essence of a good book and her message to teachers is forthright: "You should tell them what students actually like and what books to choose and why," she emphasised. "Teachers guide you too much, they should just listen more to what children say." Can one argue with that?



## *Grace's book case*



### *Some of the books Grace mentioned*

Liz Dolan

**Sudan:**

# Teachers begin national strike

On Thursday 10 March 2022, the Sudan Teachers' Committee (STC) started national strike action. In Sudan there is an ongoing revolution, a massive network of democratically elected resistance committees and now a nationwide teachers' strike.

The economic situation is dire and becoming worse day-by-day. No teacher in Sudan can live on the present salary. Families survive on remittances from abroad. The Sudanese Teachers' Committee, as per the established regulations, explained their demands to the Federal Minister of Finance. The deadline for the Ministry to respond ended 8th March. The STC met that day to discuss the Ministry's response and to plan for the strike.

## Strike Action.

The STC's strike committee includes representatives from all parts of the country. The strike will include all of the approximately 350 000 teachers in Sudan. The strike plan includes gradual strikes by cities, holding protests, and organising lectures and conferences to raise the public's awareness about the reasons for and goals of the strike.

On 8th March the Sudanese Teachers' Committee Media Office issued the following statement: 'The deadline that we set in the memorandum submitted by the committee to the Federal Ministry of Finance has passed without any reaction to it, especially as the economic conditions are worsening by the hour'. The memorandum submitted by the committee to the Ministry of Finance contained three demands:

1. Raising the minimum wage to 24,000 pounds = approx £18/ month

2. Removing the dual salary structure and containing them in one structure which is 'The Amended 2022 Structure'.

3. Disbursement of the February salary adjusted with the January salary difference this month.

The Teachers' Committee statement explains that the Ministry of Finance ignored their demands and failed to respond to their memorandum and that this reflects the Ministry's views on education and its contempt for teachers. The statement continues:

'The Sudanese Teachers' Committee held a meeting to determine the next steps, and after deliberating and reading the reports, the following has been agreed on:

1. Implementation of a comprehensive strike in all the states of Sudan, provided that it is a scheduled strike in accordance with the following:

a. Thursday, March 10, is a strike.

b. Sunday, March 13th business as usual.

c. Monday and Tuesday (14-15 March) strike action

d. Wednesday and Thursday (16-17 March) business as usual.

2. The strike committees and the auxiliary committees shall remain in permanent session.

3. Full coordination between the strike committee and the teachers' committees in the localities of Khartoum state and all states of Sudan will continue'.

## What you can do:

•Please send messages of solidarity to: [sudansolidarityconference@gmail.com](mailto:sudansolidarityconference@gmail.com)

•Download and share the latest Sudan Update with your union colleagues [here](#) pdf [here](#)

•*Read more on the economic and political crisis in an interview with Sudanese Teachers' Committee activists [here](#)*

**Bob Archer with Miriam Scharf**



**(left) Sudan Teachers Committee present their demands**

**Dementia:**

# **Care in the community**

Families are often fragmented and many more old people live on their own and are unable to cope for many reasons other than dementia. Close relatives, however, are expected to respond to the desperate and diverse needs of these people. When it's dementia, part of me wants to call them "Mad".

## **Pressures**

The pressures are enormous when someone you have known intimately, loved, and with whom you have shared part of your life, looks the same but becomes a different person. There are probably glimpses of the sane person that you grab hold of, but they disappear, as with unerring speed that person seems to seize the opportunity to wield the knife that cuts to the heart of your own grief and desperation. They know something is wrong inside their head but don't know what.

## **Care**

All the above is on top of the many anxieties about the cost or type of care. Very rarely can this "care" replace the familiarity and comfort of "home", although the "madness" can express itself as hate for exactly those things. Anger, frustration, helplessness, and an inability to use any technological devices mean you become part of the "enemy". However kind and well-trained care

workers are, they can't replace the knowledge and attention of an intimate friend or relation.

Nevertheless, you need limitless patience replying to the same questions and having to think of creative activities which will fill in the time. You want so much to open that door to comfort, sanity and understanding. But you can't! Is that one of the roots of the guilt which you feel? It's as if a shadow is cast over your life, being aware of what might have been – especially when you see elderly couples together, laughing and sharing.

## **Questions for the Future**

Can you walk away and say it's not your problem (yet!!!!)? Local authorities have done their best but given the financial constraints, support is not always adequate.

What is the future? What do we want not only for dementia sufferers but for those who have special needs? What would we want care by the community to look like? What do we really mean when using the expression "quality of life"?

I want to be able to plan for my own death, knowing that in the end life is fatal.

**A retired teacher**

**Please send contributions  
that might interest retired  
teachers - letters, reviews,  
articles of whatever length  
etc - to  
mike321peters@gmail.com.**

**Caroline Playne:**

# Peace campaigner

Caroline Playne was a campaigner and independent thinker who worked tirelessly for peace throughout her life. She was born in 1857 in Gloucestershire. Little is known about her early life. Soon after the turn of the century, she recognised the threat of war and in 1904 she was a founder member of Britain's National Peace Council, set up to support the action of the International Court in The Hague. She was active in many organisations, including the Church of England Peace League, the Hampstead Peace Society and the League of Peace and Freedom. She also attended and spoke at peace conferences, both at home and abroad. She supported 'enemy aliens' after the start of the First World War, specifically as part of the Society of Friends' Emergency Committee for the Assistance of Germans, Austrians and Hungarians in Distress. These people found themselves increasingly vilified and without accommodation and other essentials.

## Caroline Playne's novel

One of her early works was a novel, *The Terror of the Macdурghotts*, based on a conflict between two groups on a fictitious Scottish island. The protagonists remarked on the rivals as 'not behaving as though composed of rational beings but delighting in preparations for fighting

and devastating.' These words foreshadowed observations she was to make about the approaching war.

## A significant academic contribution

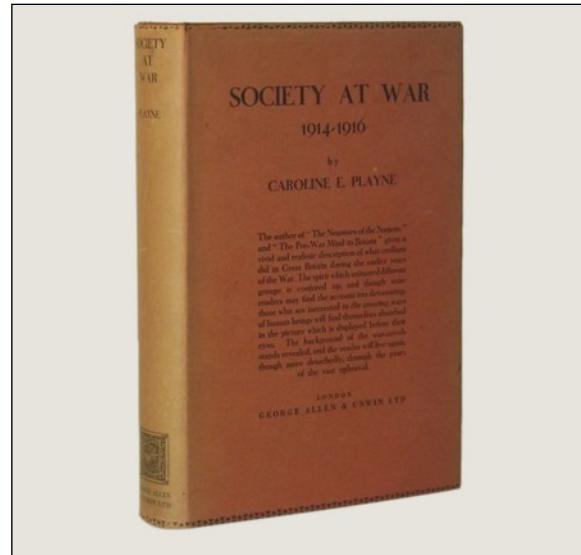
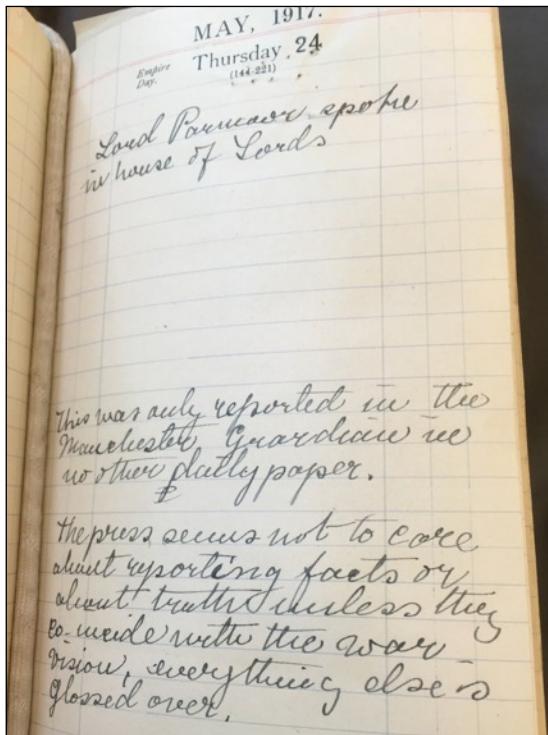
Playne also produced a detailed and original study of the mentality of the British people before and during the First World War. Her work was based on her extensive reading and her observations of the pressures and influences on the public. It contained numerous quotations and references, and her analysis of group processes and the force of the crowd contributed to the social psychology of the time. She kept records of life on the home front, which added to accounts of the period's cultural history, and she contributed to the historical debates around pacifism, dissent, nationalism and international relations.

## The idea of the crowd

Playne was determined to understand people's minds in wartime and the causes of war and she focussed on group psychology. She decided to note and record 'all that I could about the prevailing mental fever and alienation from standards of sanity.' Playne was familiar with the scholarship of the crowd. At the time she was writing, crowd behaviour was generally



*Caroline Playne is said to be one of the women in this photograph, but despite inquiries, we are not sure which one. If any of our readers does know, please share!*



**(Left) a page from Playne's diary and (above) a copy of her 'Society at War' still available online**

considered negatively, involving primitive levels of emotion. Subsequent studies have modified this view, but there are many examples of people behaving in crowds in ways they would not behave as individuals. Playne was very concerned about the loss of reason, the effects of propaganda, the hostility towards dissenters and outsiders and the growing nationalism. She argued that 'the psychosis of nationalism blinded people' and used the term 'contagion' to describe the way ideas and beliefs spread through a crowd, often encouraged by politicians and the press – a press influenced to a large extent by the government, the military and newspaper proprietors.

#### An overlooked figure

Research into women's campaigns in the early twentieth century has overlooked Playne. She has been championed by Richard Eesley of London University: 'She has not been discovered and celebrated by the growing body of published work on women in pacifist and other radical movements in the early 20th century.' However, she is sometimes referenced for her observational detail, recorded during the war years, and her diaries about day-to-day life are in the University of London's Senate House Library, to which she donated all her work before she died.

#### Caroline Playne's relevance

Can we learn from such early peace campaigners as Caroline Playne? Certainly, she might have similar observations to make on crowd behaviour and propaganda now as she made over 100 years ago. We can see how easily the press, world events, governments and individuals can cause feelings to run high and rumours and prejudice to spread, as for example in Nigel Farage's pro-Brexit campaign.

#### The contagion of prejudice

While Russia is continuing to attack Ukraine, the idea that Putin is evil can lead to the idea that Russia is evil and this is only one step away from antagonism towards the Russian people. Public figures can accelerate this process. Sir Roger Gale, MP for Thanet, argued recently that all Russians living in Britain should be returned home in order to 'send a very harsh message' to Vladimir Putin. Sometimes it takes one person to express hostility, and then others echo their words and adopt their prejudices.

A Russian woman living in Wolverhampton was fearful of abuse and discrimination because she had seen posts on social media about Russians being abused and targeted and was worried about her son being bullied at school. Russian staff at the Cultural Centre in Coventry have received death threats and the director commented, "The people are scared because they don't know what is going on...some of them are worried about whether the country will send them back to Russia, some of them are scared about how the kids will be in school.... We are worried about bullying for the kids..."

It is shocking that, over the years, we have not learned from the many wars between different groups of humans, and that Caroline Playne's activities in pursuit of peace, early last century, and her wise words are still so relevant today. With the threat from the climate crisis growing every day, we should surely be promoting amicable co-existence and working towards reducing economic growth, curtailing emissions and sharing the resources of the planet.

**Jo Buchanan**

## A proposal:

# Teaching climate change

For local online Climate Teaching and Learning workshops, set up by NEU Branches, organised and run by members, meeting informally and regularly to share their ideas and experiences of teaching and learning about climate issues

*"Britain's children are being failed by schools when it comes to learning about the climate crisis, with the subject often wholly missing from the curriculum, sidelined or mistaught", students and education experts have said.*

*"A private member's bill that would require basic knowledge of climate issues to be taught in the national curriculum receives its second reading in parliament on Friday, with cross-party support. But it is unlikely to make it to the statute books." (The Guardian, 28 January 2022)*

### Current Situation in Schools

Of course, climate issues should be part of the national curriculum for all children and young people. Many teachers are already including them in their teaching. But it is very worrying that, according to *The Guardian*, "A survey of 4,680 teachers in England found that two-thirds of secondary school teachers felt climate change was not taught in a meaningful way within their subject, even though nine out of ten said the climate was relevant to their subject area."

The survey didn't cover primary or special-school teachers but climate issues should be part of the curriculum for all children and young people, appropriate to their age. What can be done now to encourage and support all teachers to teach inspiring lessons about the climate crisis and how to respond to it?

There are of course lots of teaching materials and ideas available, including from the NEU itself. But we can

do much more. In each local area – each borough, each town, each city, each county - there must be hundreds, maybe thousands, of teachers doing good things about climate change in their classrooms. *But nobody in other schools knows about what teachers are doing because it's all locked inside each school.*

### A Way Forward

Yet there is a solution – and the opportunity has been opened up by the widespread use of online meetings as a result of Covid. *Each local branch of the NEU could set up a local regular online Climate Teaching workshop.* It would be self-organised and managed, run by teachers themselves meeting informally and regularly to share their ideas and experiences of teaching and learning about climate issues. It would require no additional commitment of time or responsibility by branch officers once the initiative had been launched.

It only needs a handful of teachers to begin and there could be separate primary and secondary meetings if participants prefer.

We know that teachers have been under enormous pressure because of Covid. But as the epidemic eases, teachers are looking for new ideas, and are coming together online with other local teachers to share and develop their teaching about climate change. This could provide inspiring support that all would welcome.

**Richard Hatcher**



Photo: University of Canterbury



Photo: The London Economic

# in action in east London

## Massive Victory at Newham Sixth Form College!

NEU Members at Newham Sixth Form College defend educational aims and defeat academisation.

After 12 days of strike action, we have won major concessions on academisation, workload and bad management practices. Thanks to everyone who sent in messages of support.

Well done to our members who stayed solid and united throughout. Collective action works.

**Here is the Joint Statement from Newham Sixth Form College and the NEU:**

Newham Sixth Form College and the NEU are pleased to announce that they have reached a resolution of their dispute. As part of that resolution, Newham Sixth Form College is happy to confirm that:

- The College's preference is to remain as an independent, stand-alone, sixth form College
- The College will maintain an inclusive course offer and its commitment to the local community
- The College has not made any decision to academise



**Redbridge NEU members supported Newvic strike**

Both the College and the NEU look forward to working constructively together through the newly agreed Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee.

**Robert Finbar**



*Teachers at the private Forest School in Waltham Forest took strike action in defence of their pension arrangements. The picket line there was really impressive!*

## Salisbury Manor NEU members win a famous victory

### News from Waltham Forest NEU

The Salisbury Manor Support Staff Six have won their battle to save their jobs and those of others. Having been threatened with fire and rehire, they balloted for action,

with six women standing up to a multi-academy trust. The Trust backed down and will NOT impose new contracts on these women!!!

We hope this serves as an inspiration to you all.

**See next page the very effective campaigning leaflet  
of the Salisbury Manor Six!**

# Women workers fighting 'fire and rehire'



Six women who work as support staff in Waltham Forest are voting for strike action to stand up to a Multi-Academy Trust who want them to sign new contracts which will lead to them:

- losing up to £2,000 in pay;
- working longer hours;
- having their sick pay reduced by 50%.

If they don't sign the contracts, they face the threat of fire and rehire!

Can you believe that after all the dedication shown by education workers during the pandemic, United Learning want these women to have reduced sick pay and work longer hours?

Treating women in this way is appalling. The Multi-Academy Trust should be looking to increase the sick pay for women workers like these so it's at least the same as teachers' sick pay.

These women are an inspiration to others for standing up for what should be basic rights.

You can do your bit to show solidarity and support by:

- sending an email to the Group Chief Executive of United Learning at [jon.coles@unitedlearning.co.uk](mailto:jon.coles@unitedlearning.co.uk)
- sending messages of solidarity to [paul.phillips@neu.org.uk](mailto:paul.phillips@neu.org.uk) and [sandra.faria@neu.org.uk](mailto:sandra.faria@neu.org.uk)
- signing the petition in protest at [bit.ly/salisburyTAs](https://bit.ly/salisburyTAs)



## Levelling up:

# Some key issues

The UK is one of the most geographically unequal countries in the developed world: compared with 26 other developed countries, it ranks near the top of the league table on most measures of regional economic inequality. (Source – Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020)

The Government document on levelling up begins by citing The Renaissance as an example of what to aim for - regeneration combined with innovation, technological breakthrough, artistic endeavour, cultivation of learning, beautiful environments and strong civic leadership! The Industrial Revolution is also referred to as a good example that the UK should emulate.

What is referred to as the Medici model (the new Industrial Revolution) will, the document says, depend on harnessing an array of interventions and catalysing a range of sectors. Levelling up will require us to:

- a. boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging
- b. spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest
- c. restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost
- d. empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

### The Government document identifies several 'MISSIONS'

**Education** – raise 'standards' through more multi trust academies, supposedly the best way to do this.

**Skills** – increase provision of high-quality skills training. Not quite sure what 'high quality skills' looks like, as it's not specified.

**Health** - reduce the gap in life expectancy between different regions

**Well-being** – to be improved in every area of the country

**Pride in Place** – increase people's happiness about where they live

**Crime** – reduce crime figures by 2030

**Local leadership** - increase devolution

This massive project has been allocated £4.8bn. When you compare this amount of money to the £18+bn either given to Tory cronies setting up companies to make money out of the pandemic or wasted on unsafe PPE, it's not even going to scratch the surface of what is needed. Of the 45 new grants unveiled recently, 39 will go to towns with a Conservative MP. According to *The*

*Guardian*, 'A fund intended to boost the UK's most deprived places appears overwhelmingly skewed towards Tory-held areas, with dozens of Conservative regions in the top-tier for assistance, despite being relatively affluent'.

Among 93 English regions placed in the priority group of three tiers to receive money from the £4.8bn levelling up fund, 31 are included, while not being ranked as in the top third most deprived places by average deprivation score. Of these 31, 26 are entirely represented by Conservative MPs, with the others having at least one Tory MP.

### Will the Levelling Up Initiative bring people out of poverty?

It's easy to see how people living in areas where there has been little or no investment over the years can be desperate enough to believe that so-called 'levelling up' will benefit those towns and cities. But this is happening against the backdrop of currently over five million children living in poverty. Last month over one million adults went a day without eating because they couldn't afford to put food on the table.

Towards the end of 2020, 23 per cent of the UK population was living in poverty. The 700,000 people plunged into hardship during the pandemic included 120,000 children. Growing poverty levels have been driven by a number of factors:

- an increase in child poverty since 2013, which rose by 4% in 2019/2020
- a 5% rise in pensioner poverty
- huge variations in housing provision
- discrimination against ethnic communities
- impact of the pandemic
- changing employment patterns
- rising cost of living

### Inflation

For comparison, Jack Monroe, journalist, food writer and campaigner against poverty, pointed out that more expensive items, such as Dine-In For £10 (available at M&S and Tesco Finest) have remained £10. If these luxurious meals had increased in price at the same rate as the basics, they would now cost approximately £34.40.

The campaigner said an upmarket ready meal range was £7.50 ten years ago and is still £7.50 today. Monroe flagged the problem by measuring the way inflation impacts people's way of life too, tweeting: "The system by which we measure the impact of inflation is funda-

mentally flawed – it completely ignores the reality and the REAL price rises for people on minimum wages, zero hour contracts, food bank clients and millions more”.

In a Twitter thread which went viral last week, he went through individual food items and explained how there had been a 344% increase in the supermarket price of such basic items as rice. In addition, baked beans that were 22p are now 32p, canned spaghetti that was 13p is now 35p and bread which was 45p is now 58p.

More than a third of people are worried about paying their bills this winter too and nearly half of those people are on low incomes, according to Citizen's Advice, while one in ten anticipate accessing crisis support this winter (meaning food banks or fuel vouchers).

### People's Anxieties Now and in the Future

Unless people and children living in poverty have more money in their pockets, then no amount of 'levelling up' will change their lives. Perhaps jobs created in the future may help assuming they pay a lot more than the minimum wage, but 2030 is a long time to wait if you cannot afford food and rent now.

I have not dealt with the issues of transport or the proposed freeports, which require much discussion, except to say that HS2 is viewed as a levelling-up initiative for London, as are freeports, which some critics see as a way of money laundering and providing easy access for drug trafficking!

Carole Regan



**23 March 2022: Redbridge District NEU banner at the head of a march by London teachers to say: 'Give us a real pay rise'**

In a Facebook message to NEU activists, Redbridge NEU District Secretary Venda Premkumar reported: "Educators who went from my school were really buzzing about how amazing it was being on a demo for the first time; they were also excited to hear about the actions from other unions like UCU, RMT and PCS and saw how similar all of our struggles were.

"It was quite touching to see how much impact the demo had on them and how they were now beginning to identify themselves as trade unionists, but more importantly to see with their own eyes how the union is relevant to their own lives during the time of a cost-of-living crisis ...

"We need more demos like this and we need to get more workers out onto them".

# Kicking misogyny out of football

One Sunday morning in February I woke to the news that a young footballer aged 20 had assaulted his girlfriend and then allegedly raped her. I was horrified and yet totally consumed by the news: a footballer was being charged with assault and rape of the young woman who he lived with.

## Football fan

My horror was partly explained by my being a football fan. If you follow a football team you have players who you like and want to watch play, others you are wanting to see gone from the squad, and some you develop not only a regard for but, being a woman with grandsons of a similar age, also almost an affection for. Being a Manchester United supporter, I feel like that about Marcus Rashford and Jesse Lingard - and Mason Greenwood was becoming such a figure. Of course, I know nothing about them and their lives, being someone who never follows any 'stories' nor social media but watching their work and reaction to other players and to situations on the pitch, you judge and assess your responses to them.

## Accusation and aftermath

I was therefore totally horrified when a young man, who was potentially a very good player and whom I viewed with some concern and hope, was being charged with assault and rape. Of course, he is yet to face a trial and until he is sentenced, he is innocent. However, none of us had anticipated that this would explode into the news, and whatever happens he faces a totally different future.

I was concerned that the young woman involved would stick to her story and would not retract, knowing all the pressures that would be on her. Putting on social media the statement that she had been assaulted, with pictures of her bruising, was a necessary and brave act.

## Young men and women

These situations must be happening so often amongst wealthy young men – famous musicians, footballers and others, although it is not only those with money who live in such a culture. For many young men, although certainly not for all, being dominant in relationships is how life is. Wealth and having friends and gophers who will ease any situation they might find themselves in, obviously makes young men feel invulnerable.

Certainly, many young women are drawn into such relationships, meetings or one-night stands, it all being part of wanting to be in that ephemeral world of celebrity. Whatever happens in these situations, however, usually remains under wraps. It is probably known about but never openly discussed.

No one talks. The young woman, whose images were momentarily on social media, must be terrified of what could happen to her and the possible actions that could be taken against her. She has to be sure that if she does give evidence she will not be harmed, although the whole episode, if it were only one episode, in itself must be horrendous.

## Men Behaving very Badly

It is apparent that this form of behaviour is standard amongst whole groups of men. It is also clear there is so little 'guidance' or 'control' when these young men - feted for their abilities on the pitch - are able to rely on silence and appear to think that they are untouchable. And sadly, in so many cases they are untouchable. No one says anything. No one squeals. It is all part of the culture. Speaking out can be difficult. The police have to ensure the safety of those who do speak out but, with



*The redoubtable Dame Helena Kennedy: You can legislate for words and actions*



### ***Large crowds gathered to protest at the killing of Sabina Nessa***

all the leaks and reports on the culture of the Met, the police cannot be considered as the guardians of standards.

#### **Responsibilities**

I hope that the case is heard and, if the man in question is found guilty as charged, that he is given a sentence which signals that his behaviour is totally unacceptable. But this raises questions about how such a culture can be changed. What needs to be done? It should not be women alone who raise these issues - men must speak out and act. Everyone - families and friends, and all involved in sports and culture - has to take this issue on. There are too many examples where those taking the knee against racism do not make an equivalent stand against misogyny and sexist behaviour. We all know that such actions may hit the headlines but they rest on a tacit acceptance of misogyny and sexism.

#### **The role of education**

As a former teacher, I question what responsibility lies within the education system and what role teachers have today? Learning to control emotions and anger is an essential topic which the school has to address but, while essential, it is also insufficient. The topic cannot be hived off to 'anger management'. Sadly, whereas twenty years ago when teaching I would have been using the case of the footballer as an essential focus for lessons that I was teaching, I suspect that with the prescriptive controls on the curriculum today, there are few teachers who would focus on what for many youngsters would be the news of the week.

#### **New laws**

Significantly, over the last few years there have been many cases where women's safety has become a high-profile issue. Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa are only two amongst so many. In Scotland, Helena Kennedy has been asked to organise a working party to look at whether sex should be added to existing hate crime legislation – the UK government having voted down a legal approach to misogyny last month. The Scottish working party will be proposing that a new Misogyny and Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act is created, which gives judges power to enhance sentences where a crime is motivated by misogyny.

Helena Kennedy knows that you cannot legislate for ideas and thoughts but that you can for words and actions. Crucially, she states explicitly that this will be a law for women within a legal system created by men. It is necessary to challenge the idea of legal neutrality which we know is a fiction. The working party wants the new offence to stand outside hate crime legislation, which was formed to protect minorities, as women are not a minority. Such legal powers could concentrate minds in criminal investigations, prosecution decisions and in the conduct of cases. While in Scotland there is a determination to try to change cultural practices, what is to be done in the rest of Britain?

**Jane Shallice**

# Hidden histories

**Editor's Note: this article was written before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It was not the author's intention in any way to belittle its immorality and lack of justification**

*"History is written by the victors, which is certainly true, but it's also written by the wealthy and the literate."*

- Megan Smolenyak.

*"I think increasingly we want to read the history that wasn't written by the victors." – Kate Williams*

One of the very generous and much-appreciated presents that I received for my last birthday was an 800+ page book entitled, 'These Truths. A History of the United States', by Jill Lepore, an award-winning professor of American History at Harvard University. On the front cover of the book there is an acknowledgment which describes the book as "Nothing short of a masterpiece" and on the back cover "the most ambitious one-volume American history in decades", followed by a further 3 pages of glowing tributes from all sorts of eminent experts and academics in the field. So, it really doesn't get much better than this!

And, having worked my way through the book, I certainly would agree that it is a most impressive, very readable piece of work which made me significantly more knowledgeable about the history of the USA.....but, and this is a very big 'but', it occurred to me that, in all these 800 odd pages, while there are a few passing references to the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, there is hardly a mention of the multitude of other CIA and US military interventions across the globe, including Iran, Guatemala, Cambodia, Laos, Haiti, Chile and Nicaragua, to name just a few. And there is not even the slightest suggestion that genocide might have been part of American Indian history. Certainly, it's not

possible to include everything in such a one-volume history, but it is almost as if a whole parallel history has simply been wiped off the face of the earth. This had me scurrying back to a book which I'd read several years ago by William Blum entitled 'Killing Hope. US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2', described by none other than Noam Chomsky as "Far and away the best book on the topic".

In his book, Blum has 56 chapters, each dealing with a different country intervention, from China in 1945 to Afghanistan more recently. At the end of the book, these interventions are summarized in an eye-watering overview as follows: the attempted overthrow of more than 50 foreign governments, most of which were democratically elected; interference in democratic elections in at least 30 countries; the attempted assassination of more than 50 foreign leaders; the dropping of bombs on the people of more than 30 countries; and the attempted suppression of a populist or nationalist movement fighting against an intolerable regime in 20 countries.

Certainly, if any international league table of foreign interventions were to be constructed, which included the Soviet Union/Russia and China, the USA would clearly be way out ahead! And yet, this remarkable history has almost been totally obliterated from the mainstream, not only in such major works as Jill Lepore's, but also, as Blum points out, from the 'final repository of objective knowledge', namely the three principal American encyclopedias, 'Americana', 'Britannica' and 'Colliers'. The effect of this 'de facto censorship' is to



**September 1973: US-backed military coup deposes elected President Allende and slaughters opponents**

leave tens of millions of Americans functionally illiterate about the history of US foreign affairs, a censorship made all the more effective as it is “woven artlessly into the fabric of education and media” rather than through any clumsy, heavy-handed, state-directed conspiracy.

So, ok, it might be argued, the history of US foreign interventions has been somewhat obscured, but hasn’t it all been for the greater good, part of the fight to rid the world of communists, terrorists and other assorted undesirables? While US foreign policy has certainly been based on hostility to revolutionary states such as the USSR and China, as well as socialist-leaning states such as Chile and Venezuela, Blum is unambiguous in his assessment: “The whole thing had been a con game ..... There had never been an International Communist Conspiracy. The enemy was, and remains, any government or movement, or even individual, that stands in the way of the expansion of the American Empire, by whatever name the US gives to that enemy – communist, rogue state, drug trafficker, terrorist ...”. And, in the case of the numerous poor, developing countries of the world that have incurred the wrath, and often the firepower, of the most powerful nation in all human history, Blum identifies a common thread: “a policy of ‘self-determination’: the desire .....to pursue a path of development independent of US foreign policy objectives.”

But, what about Britain’s role in the world? Surely, as David Cameron, the British PM, claimed in September 2014, as a prelude to advocating a resumption of military action in Iraq, “We are a peaceful people. We do not seek out confrontation”, and surely any overseas interventions that we have engaged in have all been fully documented and certainly designed to make the world a better place? Well, actually, no! In his book, ‘The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation’, Ian Cobain, writing in 2016, reveals the following startling fact: “... since the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, not a single year has passed when Britain’s armed forces have not been engaged in military operations somewhere in the world, very often fighting in several different countries at once.” While some wars have been well documented in the public domain, such as WW1, WW2 and the Falklands War, other overseas military operations have not. Here are just a few examples cited in Cobain’s book: Britain entering the civil war in Greece in 1944, before WW2 had even ended, with British troops “fighting house to house in Athens against men and women who had been allies a few weeks before, while the RAF dropped 500-pound bombs and strafed targets across the city”; Britain going to war against the Vietnamese people in 1945 to crush the Viet

Minh who had formerly battled against Japanese occupation with allied support: the complicity of the British government in the slaughter of a million people in Indonesia in 1965 and Indonesia’s genocidal invasion of East Timor in 1975; a war fought by Britain in Oman in complete secrecy for more than a decade from the mid-1960s to keep in place the corrupt Sultan who was despised and feared by his people ... and so the list goes on.

Nor, by and large, have the gory details of such operations been part of the mainstream historical narrative. For example, during the war in Oman, Cobain describes the techniques of subjugation by the British forces as involving the poisoning of wells, areas populated by civilians being turned into free-fire zones, the destruction of crops and livestock and the development of torture techniques which were later to be used in Northern Ireland. And in ‘The Blood Never Dried. A People’s History of the British Empire’, John Newsinger’s book is filled with numerous other such blood-curdling instances of British suppression techniques. In the crushing of the Mau Mau in Kenya, to cite just one example, Newsinger describes the use of “a degree of savagery” with widespread deployment of flogging, torture, mutilation, rape and summary execution of suspects and prisoners as everyday occurrences, all covered up at the time and “overwhelmed by the government-sponsored propaganda campaign that portrayed the Mau Mau as primitive savages, barely human, who had to be put down.”

In another ‘alternative’ history book, ‘Web of Deceit. Britain’s Real Role in the World’, Mark Curtis neatly summarises the key elements of what he deems to be Britain’s essentially imperial role in the world: “to act as junior partner to US global power; to help organize the global economy to benefit Western corporations; and to maximise Britain’s (that is, British elites) independent political standing in the world and thus remain a ‘great’ power”. And Curtis sees the process of historical obfuscation in similar terms to Blum: “It is not a conspiracy; rather, the system works by journalists and academics internalizing sets of values, generally accepted wisdom and styles of reporting.”

So, in the final analysis, what purpose, if any, is served by preventing the public from seeing the reality of their country’s true historical role in the world? According to Curtis, “this system makes it easier for elites to pursue policies in their interests and against the public interest.” Which is pretty similar to how Karl Marx saw things many years earlier: “Keep people from their history, and they are easily controlled.”

**Henry Tiller**