



What's The Union Doing About It?

Bill Greenshields is standing in the NUT Vice-President election. Here he sets out his view of the major issues facing education and the Union – and the need for a new, unifying ‘organising culture’.

All about Bill

A teacher...

Since 1975 Bill has taught Social Studies and English, has been Head of Careers Education in a London comprehensive, Head of Year and Community Tutor in Derbyshire, and is now...

NUT Divisional Secretary...

Since 1996 responsible for membership support, advice & casework, Union training, local communications, LEA & Governor negotiations etc in Derbyshire.

He is Chair of the Derbyshire Education Campaign – teachers, support staff, parents, Governors etc.

Bill joined the Union in 1974 as a student, became a School Rep in 1976, and has been an Officer in four different local Associations since then. He has been a regular Conference delegate and speaker since late 70s (the decade, not his age!)

National Executive member...

Since 1998 – never in a 'faction' – simply representing teachers in Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire, and Derby & Nottingham Cities.

He has had a variety of roles on the Executive in his 7 years including:

Chair, Health & Safety Committee
Vice-Chair, Salaries & Conditions Cttee
14-19 Working Party
Vice-Chair Membership & Communications
Vice Chair, Professional Unity Committee
Equal Opps (Gender) Advisory Committee
Union Democracy Working Party
European Strategies Committee
Chair Training Committee
Task Group – Local Officers & School Reps

TUC regular delegate – (elected by 37/38 Executive votes cast for TUC 2005)

National Action Committee

Representative to TUC 'Unions for Cuba'

Standing Cttee Education & Training of Teachers

NUT delegation to the Pay Review Body



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An NUT “organising culture” and the Union’s Presidential team

The world is changing very quickly – and change always brings with it both opportunities and threats. Many “certainties” of the 20th Century have disappeared, and the world is in some turmoil. Naturally, in this situation, our education service is undergoing very rapid change – and we tend to be reactive, rather than seizing the time, and promoting a radical agenda for educational and social change based on our professional views, judgements and commitments. Now, we must put the NUT at the forefront of the struggle over the future, with our own coherent policy and real strategy for change. **Otherwise we hand the “high ground” to those who would damage education, and we, at best, are left on the defensive.**

But, to achieve this, our Union has to change too – and this change is now underway. I am very proud to be identified with arguing for this process over recent years, and helping to establish it. A central Task Group and a range of working groups and Executive commissions are all genuinely struggling to improve both the democracy and functioning of the Union, and to deliver improved organisation at all levels, but particularly in terms of support for Local Officers and School Reps. Having been directly involved in getting this process underway, I want to play a very active part in making it work.

But I believe we need to go further. **We need to develop a real “organising culture”** – developing new ways to allow “ordinary members” to play a full part in the democracy of the Union, and developing strong union organisation in every school and education service. **I believe that the Union’s Presidential team have a key role to play in this membership development.**

No ‘moratorium’ on social development...

To respond to the damaging developments brought about by Government by trying to ‘stop the clock’ as some suggest is not a realistic option. Calls for moratoria on initiatives and developments are really cries of despair, because we are not in the driving seat, and the developments and changes are all imposed on us, rather than initiated by us on our terms. But we all know that there can be no moratorium on human and social development – things will change! **Nothing stands still – everything either develops or begins to decay** – that’s one of life’s certainties. Anyway, there never was a ‘golden age’ we’d want to retain or return to. For the education service to genuinely meet the needs of all children, and the needs of the nation’s people, there is indeed a need for real change and development. We in the NUT should lead this process.

This presents us with a few “challenges”!

- **We have to reassert our professionalism and our strength as trade union organised education workers.** From protest and “back-foot” defence, to radical thinking and a strategy for asserting our professional control
- **We have to put internal squabbling behind us.** Turning inwards in faction fighting is just what is NOT needed. We are fundamentally all on the same side, with few differences – let’s look outward!
- **We need to establish new structures and lines of communication** within the Union that will allow members to participate directly in its democracy on their own terms. Not everyone is a habitual meeting-goer. We need new approaches, and meetings that people feel they need to attend because they make a real difference

- **We need to build strong school based union organisation**, to give members confidence and security individually and collectively – and to demonstrate in practice that the Union is effective for teachers and educational progress
- **We need to overcome the very real divisions between teachers' organisations** in order to put an end to the Government's simple but effective “divide and rule” tactic – and to go on to establish a new single union for all teachers.
- **We need to maintain and protect our Union independence** – and never be bullied or conned into “Social Partnerships” on the Government's terms, with the threat of “isolation” if we don't comply
- **We need a short, medium and long-term coherent strategy to secure our policies.** There's nothing wrong with targets, planning and evaluation of such a strategy as long as it is set by and for the union!
- **We need to build the broadest possible campaign alliances and coalitions**, within the Trade Union movement, amongst the organisations and individuals of the “education community” and in our communities generally. Everyone has a stake in education.

I believe the Union's Presidential team should have a central role in this process. These eight points would be my priorities as Vice President and President.

It is the job, in my view, of a National Executive member to consult directly with members *in their electoral area*, to properly represent their views, to be accountable to them both in and between elections – and to contribute to the development of a radical, realistic national perspective. **The NUT Presidential team should provide a point of contact for members nationally, taking part in free flowing communication and consultation, and bringing the outcomes to the National Executive. Members nationally should be encouraged and enabled to communicate directly with them – thus the necessity for “new structures and lines of communication”.**

I have specific and practical ideas about how this all might be achieved. But so will very many members, activists and local Officers. We need to put in place realistic two-way communication mechanisms that will allow members to input ideas, perspectives and priorities, and which will also provide greater levels of accountability of Officers, and speed the task of change in the Union. That would be the first of my priorities as Vice-President, and subsequently, as President.

Education – the most fundamental of services and industries under threat

The education system – in England & Wales and worldwide – is both the most essential of services to individuals, and the most essential of industries to the societies we live in. Its product is educated, self-confident, sophisticated, innovative citizens, and the potential for soundly based, continuously developing and healthy communities and nations in a peaceful world. In a fast changing world – where each new change of technology presents us with an ethical and philosophical challenge – we need education that is developing young, critical minds. And those critical minds will be most effective when, equipped with a worldview, they can deal with challenges that are worldwide – the effects of global warming, Kyoto, genetic engineering, the struggle to develop and apply vaccines against malaria, for clean water or balanced energy

policies – are examples that come to mind. So why is it under attack – and what can we do about it? Until we answer these questions, it will be impossible to determine effective policies and strategies – and we'll continue to fight rearguard actions.

Education in itself cannot guarantee the positive outcomes suggested above. Just as one of life's certainties is that everything either develops or begins to decay, another is that **all aspects of social life are interconnected, having direct and indirect effects on each other.** We live in very divided societies in terms of class, wealth, access to power etc. What suits the vast majority of working people may not suit those with the most wealth and access to power. The demands of the most economic and politically powerful sections of society often lead to huge disparity in terms of “haves” and “have nots” – both on the domestic and world stages – and this leads to problems for the educational process, and for those who work in it. Bad education policy – i.e. “bad” from our point of view – rarely arises because of incompetence, or even out of misguided politics. There is usually something to be gained out of such policy by those who have the most already!

The effect of globalisation

For example, one of the imperatives that led to the development of a systematic approach to the provision of education was the development of the nation state. Professor Andy Green of the London University Institute of Education in his essays “Globalisation and Education” examines a developing nation's needs to build a common unifying culture and approach to knowledge through a distinctive education system. But now, with the “globalisation” process assuming the insignificance of nation states – and the mantra of “free movement of labour and capital” – the necessity for those who hold economic and political authority to maintain and sustain a national education system is reduced.

Working people still want and value their education system. But in fact, any system of education with specific and identifiable national distinctions is a positive encumbrance to those who operate economically on a transnational basis. There are class differences here. The vast majority require high quality education and advocate it for all. But those few whose profits are increasingly generated through a homogeneous ‘global market’ will not see this as a necessity. If jobs and whole industries are to be “shipped” abroad, and transient workforces “imported” to meet particular, perhaps time-limited, needs – the notion of an integrated approach to a national system of education becomes less than useful.

Why educate your own workforce when you can buy – or rent – one from elsewhere? If we ‘buy in’ all sorts of goods from foodstuffs to consumer goods, textiles to financial services – why would we need universal high quality education designed to produce innovative, creative and productive citizens?

Sale of the centuries

As Prof. Andy Green says, “As the national state becomes a marginal force in the new world order so education becomes an individualised consumer good delivered in a global market and accessed through satellite and cable links. National education ceases to exist.”

At the same time, the “neo-liberal” economics associated with globalisation, which declare “market forces” to be synonymous with “freedom”, and which are enshrined in the mortally-wounded European Union Constitution and the very-much-alive-and-kicking *European Services Directive*, demand that education systems should be broken up, and the profitable bits sold off to the highest bidder.

The European Commission publication on “*World Trade In Services*” put it like this. “*Services negotiations should extend liberalisation world-wide, creating new trade and investment opportunities in all service sectors.*” Currently there is strong debate about whether our education system should be opened up to “*liberalisation world-wide*” – another term for privatisation open to transnational companies’ bids. The “*European Services Directive*” only applies to “for profit” services. But it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that the education system in England & Wales is not and will not be “for profit” as the Private Finance Initiative rapidly extends, and private sector involvement generally accelerates through Academies etc. The “*Directive*” is in line with the *World Trade Organisation’s “General Agreement on Trade In Services”* which declares, “*GATS is the first ever set of multilateral, legally enforceable (their emphasis) rules governing international trade in services*”

There is a lot of money to be made out of education “*liberalisation world-wide*”. Global spending on education exceeds one thousand billion dollars, and covers the employment of 50 million teachers, the education of a billion students in hundreds of thousands of educational establishments. Our international education trade union organisation, *Education International* says, “*Some see this immense bloc as a dream market for future investment.*”

Michael Milken, a leading US finance capitalist speaking to Arthur Levine, President of the Teachers’ College, Columbia University put it a little more bluntly. “You guys are in trouble – and we’re gonna eat your lunch.”

James Tooley of Newcastle University – a privatising theorist and practitioner – says, “*We mustn’t be tempted by the reassuring spin that the public sector can hope to match the incentives of the private sector. The way forward for education is to bring in (these) incentives... Education is far too important to be excluded from the virtues of the profit motive.*”

Education International puts it all very clearly. “*In the wake of other major public services which have been subject to extensive privatisation and deregulation, public education is increasingly being targeted by predatory and powerful entrepreneurial interests. The latter are aiming at nothing less than its dismantling by subjecting it to international competition.*”

This is the reality that the Union and newly elected Vice-Presidents and Presidents will be facing over the foreseeable future. It is a reality that I have been writing about and raising for some time in the Union – a reality that demands a new response from National Officers of the Union.

Educational Policy, Social Partnership & Political Exclusion

Against this background we can understand the various aspects of the Government’s education policy. Be fair... Tony Blair gave due warning at the TUC just a few months after the May 1997 General Election. He described in his speech his, “... *essential challenges of modernisation. The first is to create an economy fully attuned to a new global market. The second is to fashion a modern welfare state where the role of Government changes so it is not necessary to provide all social provision.*” He defended this commitment to continuing deregulation and privatisation by insisting that the process of globalisation of capital was both “*irresistible and irreversible.*”

This early statement of policy provided the ground from which all subsequent public service policy would flower. It was significant that he made the statement at the TUC. He later made it clear that he regarded ‘traditional’ Trade Unionism as a “*force of conservatism*”, Public sector trade unions, he said, had left “scars on my back.” He told a Headteacher conference that teachers were largely “*small ‘c’ conservatives who are suspicious of change and who resist change.*”

We are all only too aware of the kinds of change he had in mind. We see the:

- continuing undermining of LEAs
- encouragement of competition between schools, and the development of the illusion of parental choice
- establishment of differential funding of schools
- encouragement of the voluntary and private sector to take control of schools and support services
- inducements to abandon national pay and conditions
- undermining of the professional role of teachers
- proposed establishment of “academic” and “vocational” pathways post 14 – and “Specialist Schools” to provide them.

You can add to the list, but it appears very difficult to find an individual Government policy which does not conform to the general deregulation, fragmentation and privatisation imperative put in place by the economic and political powers and structures set up alongside the ‘globalisation’ process. These are New Labour’s real “Social Partners”, and they seem intent on creating that vision of education described by Prof Andy Green as an “*individualised consumer good*”.

Yet they profess to have established a “Social Partnership” with some education unions, including teacher unions. This “Partnership” (proposed by Government as a model for many more in the public sector) began with ‘The Agreement’ – excluding the NUT – concerning workforce remodelling. This was a successful attempt by Government to divide the teacher unions, which up to that point had been united to an unprecedented level in demanding workload reduction. Not only was the divide and rule tactic successful, but the Government then diverted the workload reduction issue into “remodelling” and an attack on teachers’ professional roles.

There were some within our own Union, some in very senior positions, who seemed to revel in our position of “glorious isolation”. However, we are still running to catch up the ground we have lost – and the “Social Partnership” is now extended to deal with an attack on our pay, opening the way for eventual workplace school-by-school pay bargaining. The approach, ‘isolated but gloriously pure’ was supposed to gain members for the NUT from the signatory unions. This has failed. Those signatory unions who thought they would gain members from the NUT have also failed – in one case spectacularly so. Teachers may not like the Agreement, but they like wasteful inter union competition where only the employer gains, even less.

The proponents of “Social Partnership” within the trade union movement generally come from one of two positions.

There are those who genuinely believe that despite all the evidence through all their senses of increased social divisions, widening poverty gap and unequal access to power, that Unions, employers and Government can be long-term sustained partners. They are constantly ‘disappointed’ by the actions of Government – for example over the attacks on our pensions, in pursuing privatisation, and the massive threat to jobs...currently in the Civil Service. Nonetheless, they value the patronage of government. They persuade themselves – again – that somehow we are all in the same boat – even as the MP takes the pension increase, the employer takes the fat cat bonus, and the worker takes the dole.

Then there are those that know full well that in any sustained “Partnership” the Government and employers are the Senior Partners, the trade unionists very much the shelf-

stackers. But they argue, though the outcomes of such “Partnerships” might be terrible, they would be ‘even worse’ without union participation. What a counsel of despair! Of course, there is an alternative. The independent union “organising culture”.

We need to continue to reflect our members’ opposition to the content of the “Social Partnership” agreements, and to demonstrate to our sister unions the huge strategic mistake they are making. They remain however our sister unions, and fellow TUC affiliates, and while their policy is disastrously wrong, we need to approach them and their members with respect if we are to keep in sight our objective of establishing a single education union. Sharp, forthright debate does not have to be conducted at the level of insult! To the extent that our relationship to these sister unions is governed solely by the Agreement, only the Government is in a win, win situation.

Thought must be given at national level to how we can find common ground, such as the campaigns over pensions, and the task force on pupil behaviour and in our anti racist work, where despite differences over the Agreement, teacher union unity can put the Government on the back foot.

This is not the time to retreat from professional unity. Our current disagreements, damaging as they are, nonetheless provide us with an imperative to debate sharply but honestly the differences and clarify the things that unite us.

Our twin objectives must be to put an end to the cynical use of unequal “Social Partnerships” to promote anti- worker and anti-education policies, and at the same time, end the attempted isolation of the NUT by developing a principled unity of teacher unions, and between the NUT and other TUC affiliates.

Again, I believe the Presidential team of the NUT should have particular responsibility in these areas, and in spearheading the effort to create a new single union for all teachers. I would want to take this up through the implementation of a policy that I proposed to the Executive a couple of years ago, and that was subsequently unanimously endorsed at the TUC.

This called for all education unions and TUC affiliates concerned with vocational training for young people to develop a plan for an integrated programme of education, vocational training and youth employment. This really would represent an alternative strategy to that pursued by Government – which is probably why the current TUC leadership has been reluctant to allow it to happen.

‘Bringing Down The Barriers’

This is a breakthrough document for our union – a statement that we are re-engaged with strategic and political thinking about where the teaching profession and the education service should go. Many of us joined the NUT because it held the high-ground in educational thinking and campaigning. “Bringing Down The Barriers” is a bold statement, and challenges everyone involved in education to think for themselves.

We stand clearly for equality of opportunity, through a properly resourced, teacher led, publicly funded, controlled and accountable state system of Primary and Secondary Comprehensive education. The shape of such a system and the functioning and organisation of such schools is not a simple issue.

The early years of the 21st century are very different from those of the 1960s and early 1970s which saw the birth of comprehensive education across England and Wales. And the rate of change is obviously accelerating. But the fragmentation of the system must stop. We need

more co-operation, more consistency and more real opportunities for all our children – not less. The union's positive approach in Wales which has resulted in real advance deserves the special attention of the whole union.

The **BDTB** is more than a 'statement'. It is an organising document. It recognises in its earliest paragraphs that the single biggest factor affecting the educational achievement of children remains the social class that they are born into, and the degree of disadvantage and poverty they experience. The Government's "5 year Strategy" document recognises the same issue and provides the statistics and graphs. But they, having recognised the point, carefully avoid any responsibility for tackling social class disadvantage, and the poverty levels that continue to grow.

BDTB raises the questions of how the world is changing and how we operate against a backdrop of economic and political factors that influence the nation. It is a call to action – and provides a strong starting point for a real education debate. The children we teach will help shape the world in which we grow older. What affects world economies and the big ideas that drive our world, affects us all. Our members are tackling such issues every day in Primary and Secondary classrooms. "**Bringing Down the Barriers**" raised broad questions: about technology, the likely huge impact of countries such as China and India, about the nature of trade and the structures of democracy, regionalism and local accountability. The NUT has much to say that is original and challenging – much that is essential if the profession is to reassert itself and take some control.

Winning change – making an impact

The Union's international work has been exemplary over the last decade or so – though repetitive and predictable speeches at Conference, often simply posturing on the back of other workers' very real struggles, do not do this work justice. We have had major impact in our international work very recently: think of the union's work with Commonwealth teacher unions and governments on the economic 'hijacking' of their teachers by Western European countries. Think of our big role in Make Poverty History. Think of the fact that we can fill our International Development Union Education training courses over and over again. Our members think globally, and we have to focus on making our local, national and international work part of a coherent whole, based on the unity of the teaching profession and organised workers' trade union solidarity at all these levels.

At the launch Conference of "**Bringing Down The Barriers**" it was proposed by a speaker from The Education Network that we should build the "broadest possible coalitions" around its ideas, to counter the appalling roll-over to market forces that underpins Government policy. The NUT and our **BDTB** statement must be at the centre of a whole new education debate, and central to the development of a strategy for achieving a regenerated comprehensive education system, with extended schools at the centre of their communities. I proposed to the Executive that the Union should work towards organising a conference of a very wide range of individuals and organisations to discuss its proposals and to "kick off" this debate – and this will be happening soon. The NUT is at its best as an advocate and campaigner for education advance. But **BDTB** requires more than advocates and advances – it is about making changes that actually impact. It is about winning change that materially makes a difference to the working lives of teachers and the life chances of those they teach. To make an impact we must plan and organise. **As Vice-President I would want to make such work another of my priorities.**

Participation, factionalism & sectionalism – and building our union

I make no apology for returning to the question of union organisation and democracy. It is not something that can be ignored, particularly at times of election! Essentially the union is healthy. Our policy is sound and the BDTB is innovatory and strategic. We are recruiting in record numbers, especially amongst newly qualified teachers, and have an activist base that many other unions would give their right arm for. Members, whenever asked, express satisfaction with the Union. Though we always need new and younger activists, there is no crisis in our organisation. Our international work is valued by teachers in many nations. At last, under Steve Sinnott's leadership, we are involved in laying down strategic building blocks for the future. With Christine Blower's DGS election, we have a real opportunity to pull together as never before. We must not waste it through residual factional infighting.

Factionalism

Yet still very few members participate in the processes of the Union – and this is true of all the unions. This has left a vacuum, and has allowed very small self-appointed groups or “factions” to “run” the union. They have their own policy conferences through the years and closed meetings on the evening prior to each Executive meeting to decide their ‘line’ for the following day. They put up “their” candidates in election, and are preoccupied with maintaining or winning a majority on the Executive and the National Officers. This nonsense has to stop, and in fact it is breaking down. No one should be sad to see it go. It held us back from looking at things objectively and without preconceptions. It has stopped us from making decisions that could take us forward. Worse still it stood in the way of us looking at issues in their own right and making our own minds up. By dividing the Executive into two “blocks” and some “independents” for strategic discussion, it prevented a proper exchange of ideas.

Most important of all factionalism excluded the members – ordinary teachers – from influencing decision-making. It is/was no way to run any 21st Century organisation, least of all a Trade Union where the principle ‘unity’ has a very special and coveted place. In the age of information and communication technology, a membership organisation such as the NUT does not need to be led by a few self-appointed gurus. It can be directed by the views and priorities of its members.

Nonetheless, we enter the coming elections for National Officers with candidates selected by the old factions in “closed door” conferences and caucuses... selecting, doing deals, falling out, stitching up etc and enjoying every minute of it. They have yet to notice what tens of thousands of members noticed during the last year. The recent elections for General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary in many ways helped close the phase of factionalism and the closed-mind-set. Candidates found themselves discussing the union up and down England and Wales and recognised that much, which paraded as division and difference, was artificial. This was brought home even more strongly at annual conference. Following these elections, there is a strong sense of “team”, an end to old feuding.

It is my genuine wish that, in the election in which I put myself forward as a candidate – the union steps further away from making choices and decisions based on putting factional allegiance before union allegiance. I am proud that already, I have drawn nominations from associations representing the broadest range of progressive opinion throughout the Union. Long may that continue – because no office other than the Presidential team has a greater responsibility to represent the views of all members or a greater responsibility to work to bring the union together.

Participation

In addition to the issues already outlined dealing with the need to increase participation, Union Training is critical too in equipping members with the skill and experience to take up leadership roles throughout the union. I have consistently argued that such training should be far more widely organised at local level, making it more accessible to members. As Chair of the Training Committee, I am now pleased to see this development getting properly underway.

The union has embarked on a programme of building a Young Teachers Section. I spoke in support of this at Conference on behalf of the Executive. What a wonderful opportunity to assist the organisation and participation of young teachers, to hear their views and priorities and to support their efforts to revitalise parts of the union where that is needed. But we must all unite to ensure that this is not diverted into yet another factional battleground. The Young Teachers' Section will be a test of the unity of the union and of our ability to overcome one of the more dangerous manifestations of sectarianism – between young and older workers. Both young and older NUT members have much to teach each other and as much to learn. The union nationally must not see in the Section any kind of threat and can be congratulated for taking such swift action arising from conference policy and devoting serious resources to it. But to build anew we must also be prepared to let go of some of things and some of the ways of doing things that only kept the factional divide going.

We are all in it together

Equally we must guard against unnecessary “sectionalisms” being introduced into the Union structures as a result of well intentioned decisions to improve participation from particular sections of teachers – black teachers, disabled teachers, LGBT teachers etc. Equality issues are issues for all members, activists and Officers. Involvement of all members is similarly a question for all members. Such issues must not be “hived off” into special interest groupings and dismissed by others as “their property”. This would be very negative for our internal unity, at a time that such unity is a priority in the face of the strength of the threats from outside. There are serious questions and views on all sides of this argument. As Vice-President and President I would want to see the views of all on this issue (and other similarly contentious issues) taken seriously and treated with respect, rather than lampooned, caricatured and distorted for short term advantage of one ‘side’ or the other. The demise of the divisive ‘political’ factions in the union must not see the growth of a new form of internal division and rancour.

Building our Union

My vision is different. We have to find a way that members can effectively lead the union in the direction they want. This would involve – for a few examples – the development and resourcing of interactive websites, regular email correspondence, chat-rooms, “virtual” and actual focus group discussions, opinion surveying, regular reporting to members and requests for views – as well as the absolutely indispensable process of School, Association, Divisional and Regional meetings. There can be no doubt that our Associations and Divisions, remaining the key democratic structures of the Union, would be revitalised by the systematic use of other additional communication channels. This is part of the “organising culture” in which members feel the need to take part in Union activity – because it reflects their reality and makes a real difference to them and their working lives.

Such a culture results in strong workplace organisation, and strong School Reps. A strong and consistent network of School Reps across our schools would give us a very clear idea

about the views and priorities of members. The Union needs to make the development of such school based organisation and direct support for School Reps a priority.

As I said in my opening paragraphs, I believe these developments – new methods of communication and consultation with members, more local training and the development of strong union organisation at school and service level, with proper facilities for and recognition of School Reps – should be the first priority of the Vice-Presidents and President – and I certainly would be committed to promoting and reporting on such developments.

In conclusion – taking the Union forward

There is no doubt that we are in for a very “challenging” time. Our vision of education needs to be further developed – but we know now that it will not be shared by those who make up the current Government – and certainly not by those who make up the current “Opposition” in Parliament. They are likely to continue to respond to the big “world pressures” for deregulation, fragmentation and privatisation of services. However, there is such a thing as “people power” – and it can be developed here too.

In our broader roles as teachers, and as the leading teacher union, we have a responsibility too to assert that ordinary people have talents, skills, views and priorities that are just as important as those of society’s “Great & Good”. People should not feel that they have to abdicate their decision making, and allow others to decide on their behalf. They should not feel cowed or intimidated by the enormity of social change, or by the apparent complexity of issues, or by the patronising self-importance of those who claim to be political leaders, and who preside over escalating problems, wealth/poverty gap, environmental disaster, conflict and war. The injustices and instability in the world are man made, and are largely based on greed for wealth and power by a very small proportion of the world’s population. Our Union is a major democratic institution, representing ordinary working people. As such we’ve our work cut out.

“People power” is not just something that we hear about on news broadcasts. We too can analyse the situation, decide policy, determine a strategy and make it happen. The Union is well placed to play its full part in this. We are the largest and fastest growing teacher union. We have members in every town and village throughout England and Wales. We are affiliated to the TUC – the largest membership organisation in the UK ... massively larger than any political party. We should be purveyors of solutions that advance the interests of all teachers and which build the education service. We must determine to involve all our members, pull together, work for professional unity, play our part here at home and internationally – and make a real difference.

By seeking to make that difference we also build our union. I have argued that in order to set the pace and force change in education, the Union must change too. We need to modernise. We need to unite the teaching profession. We need to seek allies. We need to focus our resources to deliver on principles. I will work hard and long to promote this approach, with no loyalty other than to our members, the education service, and the children. I hope you will support my candidacy for Vice-President.