

Day 10: Barnsley to Sheffield

And finally it happened, I guess we were lucky to have avoided the rain so far, but today made up for it. Wet, wet, wet. Despite the weather, however, it turned out to be another great day.

Breakfast at Wortley Hall, thanks to GMB, was as one would expect from this great place which was full of people on breaks over the Bank holiday weekend. Not sure what they made of having to mix with us lot ;-)- actually the few I talked to were very supportive. Whilst appreciative of the hospitality, I was conscious that compared to the original Jarrow marchers, I was being spoilt. Those marchers used to send the food they received back home to their starving families – the wives and the bairns, who had not even seen some foodstuff like jam for some time. Shocking, until we realise that we may be going back to those days with more and more people relying on food banks.

Another great send off outside Barnsley Hospital with John Puntis, our drummer coming back for another march, and helping to keep the spirits up during the wet march. Achieved another first as we had our lunch standing under a bridge on A61 – fine dining indeed. Actually the lunch was quite good, especially as I stood next to Camilla who had brought some home grown vegetables- had some really crisp and sharp radishes and rocket, lovely.

Christine Hyde kept me company during the morning and her story was remarkable. Her mother was very distrustful of the policy to establish Foundation Trusts and cautioned Christine about the shape of things to come. Of course, Christine took no notice until 3 years ago when the current reorganisation started, and she did her own research and was shocked to read what was going. So she called a local community meeting to raise awareness and since then has been trying to inject some local accountability. With me being a poacher turned gamekeeper I can see why she was and is still getting the run around, but she is one determined women and continues to be a 'pain in the neck' for her local CCG.

A theme that has come up time and time again is to do with (lack of) medical leadership, and it seems ironic that now that the GPs themselves are being subjected to privatisation, they are beginning to realise that they have fallen into the trap. I hope that we will rise above the divisions in the profession and join with all other NHS workers and try and save the NHS; I personally believe that it is more about damage limitation given that a lot has already happened. For the last two days we have been hearing about the Doncaster Care UK workers, who have again gone on strike today, and the same fate awaits all in the NHS.

We need to remember Martin Niemoller's quote

*"First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a socialist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a trade unionist;*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me—
and there was no one left to speak out for me.”*

The Silver City lived up to its reputation and we were greeted by a brass band on the outskirts and they marched us to the rallying point near the Sheffield Children's Hospital. I was interested to see that the crowd was not easily taken in by the Labour Party speaker's claims about being the defender of the NHS- David Blunkett, and other labour leaders, have not been seen by the locals! And why do they have to wait till the next election, there are ways to show that the Labour Party cares now was the Doncaster workers cry. To the frustration of some, myself included, it is not possible to have more debates at these rallies, and in any case I always thought that heckling was a legitimate and necessary activity!

Like all crises, this one has also brought out the best in people; I continue to be impressed with the satire and songs- the Socialist Choir and Body of Sound Choir together put on a great show with especially written songs. Did you know that there is a Campaign Choir Network- who sing especially in support of causes – see <http://campaignchoirs.org.uk/> - Fantastic.

Not only did the ladies sing for us, they laid out a most amazing spread, the table was buckling with food, and someone counted 10 different cakes alone for dessert! And then something that I have never seen before, they explained what was on offer in terms of accommodation – whether vegetarian or not, what sort of bedrooms, presence of pets and how we could get back to the starting point tomorrow! An auction in reverse, almost. Many of them went away disappointed as there were far more offers than marchers to take places up. I am being looked after tonight, along with Fiona and Joanne, by Leni who hails from New York and Jack, both former teachers in their lovely home.

If anybody had told us that we would be having such fun on the march, I do not think we would have believed it; but the great British spirit is alive and well. So, my advice to politicians would be “Be afraid, be very afraid” – the people are angry and they are getting organised, and the day of reckoning is coming.



John Puntis



Fine dining under A61 bridge



Christine Hyde- not to be trifled with



Reception by brass band



The Choir

Rajan Madhok

25 August 2014

DECLARATION: I am walking in personal capacity and the views expressed are mine alone, and are meant to inform not criticise or insult. If you like them, tell others and if you do not, tell me- just kidding, but do help me with my prejudices/arrogance. I may be old but can still learn. Blogs available at www.leadershipforhealth.com