

Day 13: Mansfield to Nottingham

I have finally arrived – receiving the Badge from the Notts Ex and Retired Members association today was a real highlight. I believe that they do not give these badges easily and so feel very privileged that they decided to give badges to all 300 milers. I was actually working in Ireland during the miners strike so have no direct experience of those times, but having lived in the northeast and now having marched through Yorkshire and Derbyshire I can see the impact of pit closures. I have always had a lot of respect for the miners and their families who have suffered a lot in the last few decades. The fear of losing the NHS now is galvanising these communities, and they are coming out in larger numbers.

We set off from Mansfield where we had stayed in a primary school, and after great 'craic' the evening before; there was song and poetry and good fun was had by all. Sleeping communally can be challenging but we did manage, and the school had done well to get some decent mattresses.

We assembled at Kings Mill Hospital to start off and in addition to the usual addresses, we had Dr John Dale, Consultant Occupational Health Physician join us. Suffice to say that he spoke from the heart and pointed out the challenges facing the health service, and his message struck home with the marchers. As an occupational health physician he obviously sees the effect the NHS changes are having on the staff and he is also very aware that these services are now largely in private hands. Given my interest in worker safety I share his concerns, especially the limited availability of 'Occy Health'.

As in the days before meet new friends and share stories/experiences. Whilst the public is rightly concerned about clinical services, they do not always appreciate that a lot of other NHS activities are also being prepared for 'sale'. We talk about R & D work going to tender, and the growing influence of the 'Big 5' management consultancies in policy making.

I also met with Janina Kehr, an anthropologist, from France, who came to observe the march for two days. She is undertaking a comparative study of the Spanish health system and the NHS, both of which share similarities in terms of increasing privatisation, and she is studying the role of public opinion and activism in stopping such reforms. So, we are not alone in our struggle. Clearly the ideology of market introductions is widespread and we bemoan the fact that there seems to be blind acceptance of the superiority of the private sector; many of us who have direct experience of working in both, public and private sectors, however a contrary view about their efficiency not to mention their values.

The media has started taking increasing interest in our march; and so we are regularly being interviewed, and every now and then I have also to play my part. I have always struggled with the sound bite way of engaging with TV, and been struggling to explain briefly why I am marching. I think I finally got it when I said to Notts TV that I was marching to stop the destruction of the world's best health care system.

What happens next when we arrive in London and beyond is anybody's guess, but judging by the last few days it seems to me the march is gathering momentum and we have been told that the final rally will be in Trafalgar Square on 6 Sep. Going by the famous quote by Gandhi "First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, and then you win", it looks like that we are onto something since the establishment is no longer able to ignore or ridicule the Darlomums and hopefully we will win the fight to save the NHS.

Just to confirm that we are onto something here Nottingham turned out in large numbers for the final rally and we were again spoilt for choice as there were lots of people who wanted to take us home to give us dinner and beds! I was chosen by Shelley and Ben, who have taken me to their beautiful home where I have just spent a wonderful evening with their two young sons, Alfie and Sol, and the baby girl Martha- families is what life is about. What a great way to finish another day's march.



Getting my Badge- an honour



Dr John Dale



Breakfast in Mansfield



Arriving in Nottingham

Rajan Madhok

28 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