

Day 17: Market Harborough to Northampton

Bill Cotton came to see us off this morning from Market Harborough to Northampton, having been there when the original Jarrow marchers came through in 1936 – he remembers the day well (he called it the Hunger march though) and how everyone, poor as they were, pitched in to bring food for the marchers. Bill is very upset with what is happening and holds politicians responsible for breaking up the welfare state, and feels that Guy Fawkes should have finished the job. Many others also joined in sending us off on day 17, and it turned out to be another interesting day.

Nigel, who works as a healthcare assistant, wanted to walk even though he was going to work on the afternoon shift. He feels the pressure at work, with having to do more with less, when absences are not covered and gradual reduction in staff numbers. Having worked in newspaper business before he knows how the general public is being manipulated by the media. He feels for the staff who feel disempowered and not able to speak up.

The latter theme gets picked up by Simon, who is a care worker on zero hour contract. The agency he works for has recruited a lot of workers and hence there is competition for hours, however limited – beggars cannot be choosers situation, and no one complains as they then lose whatever little they can get. Simon moved from London and in addition to poor income he is spending more on transport and fuels during winter.

Really sad as the general rhetoric is about looking after staff – Len Holden, a former academic in Human Resources, or rather human remorse as he calls it, has studied the subject extensively, including internationally, and feels that one of the biggest myths is about ‘staff being our greatest asset’. He feels that profits triumphs staff welfare everytime in the private sector (almost).

We walk along the old Market Harborough to Northampton railway line – and almost 14 miles of the day’s march were on a trail. It reminded me of the Trans Pennine Trail with miles of (now long gone railways) track with banks on either side, especially on the western side of the TPT. The hard ground and the monotony today was broken by the two tunnels – Oxenden and Kelmars, both over 400 meters long and pitch dark! Thankfully there were some torches and we somehow found our way through the tunnels. It appears that Churchill’s train had stopped overnight on these tracks.

We were joined by a father and son team who came dressed in the 1930s style, and managed to walk all the way! They shared the story of the Pathology department workers lock out at Northampton Hospital – the management had to finally give in. But for how long is anybody’s guess.

The cynical view is that Simon Stevens has been brought in to finish off the job he started under the Labour government, when he was Tony Blair’s advisor, and the NHS will be privatised in the next 2-3 years and Simon Stevens will be back in the private sector to benefit from the privatisation of the NHS. If that happens he won’t be the first one, as many other senior NHS figures have already moved into private sector.

And I start to feel depressed again, and especially as the feet are hurting now. But the rally in Northampton revives me. We hear from various speakers and especially from Tony Clarke who was a Labour MP from 1997-2005 and is now with the Green Party. Seemingly he had argued against the Foundation Trust Policy and feels very strongly that Labour's achievements and the extra investment in the NHS is in real danger of being wasted. He is keen to promote a cross party agreement on the NHS.

So, all to play for still – the march is growing, and it looks like there is going to be a great rally in London. Come and join us – only 5 more days left, apart from a worthy cause it is good to meet some great folk, see who we found on the march today – Mary and Kate are both actors (actresses).



With Bill Cotton



The Jarrow marchers



In the tunnel



Tony Clarke



With Kate and Mary

Rajan Madhok

1 September 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