

## Day 18: Northampton to Bedford

Disaster- the tomatoes are dying! We (or rather my wife, Lisa) had finally started a vegetable garden and planted lots of tomatoes also. We are not sure why, but lots of tomatoes are rotting, and instead of a bumper harvest, we will be lucky to have a handful. Disappointed, but press on with saving the NHS, leaving Lisa to look after the home affairs, as usual. Missing home though.

The Asian Women's Centre in Northampton had put us up for the night and fed us well the night before – good Indian curry – and gave us a good breakfast also, and we were well prepared for the march. The weather also helped and it was sunny throughout.

Mary, a local person, was a bit disappointed with the turnout, she thought that given the concerns about not just Northampton, but also neighboring hospitals, that there would be a lot more of them. None the less, there is growing support for the march, and attracting people from all over. Mary's friend, Sue had come because of her daughter, who is an audiologist in Sunderland and who had marched with us from Jarrow. David and Nicky, a retired couple had travelled from Suffolk to march, and were disappointed that other commitments precluded them from doing more days. David used to work for British Rail and compared to railways he thought that the NHS privatisation was not a sell-off but more of a giving away.

Ian, a biomedical scientist and union rep, recounts his experiences of being at the sharp end of privatisation; Pathology services were opened up to the private sector many years ago- 'Carterisation' as he called it. And we remember the Decontamination strategy and outsourcing of CSSD services, and how such privatisations were destabilising hospitals.

Great excitement on the way, as the route takes us through Lavendon, the village which featured heavily in the Jarrow march, mainly because some of the iconic pictures of the original march were taken there. So, of course we had to recreate the scene – with big fanfare and press; a new plaque is to be added to mark our passing through. I will be part of history now! The excitement meant that we ran late (quite late) and coupled with no place to walk on the busy road, we ended up being 'bussed' for some of the march, drat!

Andy Burnham, the Shadow Health Secretary, joined us in Biddenham village, just outside Bedford and walked the last mile with us. A huge crowd awaits us in Harpur Centre, and by now the familiar story is recounted as people share their concerns about running down of local hospital services. It is interesting to note that so far hardly anyone has criticised their local services despite the MidStaffs and Keogh Trusts failures, and regular media stories of failures. Most people are very grateful for the care, and also prepared to accept some lapses – access, and local access, is the main concern. It may be that the marchers and supporters are more informed and understand how the NHS is being run down by politicians to pursue the market ideology and to cut down the welfare state, and for the benefit of the already very rich. Someone recalls Noam Chomsky's quote "That's the standard technique of privatisation: defund, make sure things don't work, people get angry, you hand it over to private capital."

Nearby in Cambridge there is a 'battle' going on about tendering of elderly care services, with a contract value of £800 million over five years – the process has cost about £1m already, again money which could have been spent elsewhere. Major concerns expressed about how services were being tendered generally and the open conflicts of interests. Andy Burnham promises to repeal the H & SC Act and fight the TTIP- and the crowd cheers, but there are private murmurings about whether he can deliver the whole package needed.

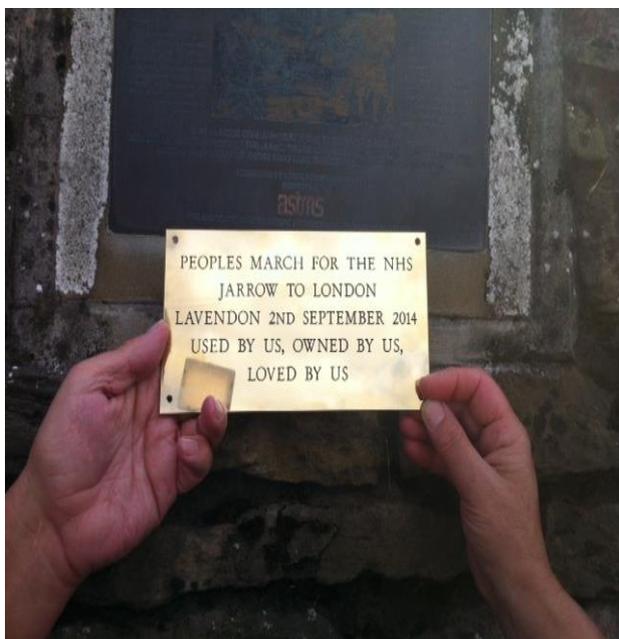
Coming into Bedford was important for another reason, as the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin, which I chair, is based here and it was good to see some of my colleagues joining us for the rally. No way was I going to be allowed to pass through without the Indian hospitality, and so have ended up at the home of Ramesh Mehta, the President of BAPIO. He and his wife Ritu were at the Cricket ODI in Birmingham earlier and with India's win today, the spirits were high; the dinner made by Ritu was excellent. And all is well in my world for tonight- I hope I do not have nightmares about tomatoes!



*Our poor tomatoes*



*Bianca, Anjana and Nicola- fellow marcher*



*Part of history in Lavendon village*



*Listening to Andy Burnham*

**Rajan Madhok**

**2 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](http://www.leadershipforhealth.com)