

Day 20: Luton to St Albans

Eat your heart out – see what you missed by not joining the march. I have now a signed CD of The Spirit of 45 from Ken Loach himself. More importantly, finally we also have a clear roadmap for what next for the NHS. Ken Loach spoke at our rally in St Albans and as one would expect he is not happy with the way things are in the NHS – public good turned into private greed, with help from our main political parties. He does not buy Andy Burnham's idea of repealing the H & SC Act, and would like to hear this promise from Ed Balls and Ed Miliband directly. After all it was the Labour Party who took Thatcher's reforms further and provided the platform for what we have now with massive and wholesale privatisations. His advice was clear:

- Stronger unions – but doing the bidding of the members, and especially the progressive ones, and not cater to the lowest common denominator
- Stronger professional leadership – from clinicians
- And then the Political leadership – where he sees a new model emerging.

His aspiration is for a coalition of the minority parties: the Greens and Left Unity, and who can put pressure on the Labour to get back to its core values. In any case he urged the gathering to make sure that their votes count. Stirring stuff.

The day started with a breakfast provided by the Luton Council in a café opposite the Town Hall, Dave Taylor, the local councillor, told me about the burning down of the Town Hall in 1919. Seemingly, the great and the good gathered to celebrate the winning of the War, but not a single veteran was invited – in protest the veterans burnt the hall down. Looks like some things never change, the poor remain cannon fodder and for providing rich pickings to the well off. The march took us via the disused rail track and now cycle track to Harpenden on way to St Albans – very scenic, and well maintained with a tribute to Eric Morecambe in the countryside. Harpenden Green provided the setting for the lunch stop, and Terry paid twice what we would pay for his lunch bait (as he calls it)! He won't be moving down south in a hurry.

Discussions about local democracy and why the local authorities are not challenging the Government about austerity cuts, but then how does one do that with Eric Pickles! We talked about the conundrum between access, quality and finance- and am surprised to see that some of my fellow marchers have a very limited understanding of patient safety issues in the NHS. Good to see young folk joining us- Jack Murphy a student in Nottingham came because of his concerns for not just the NHS but generally. He talked about their stance on privatisation of student loan and how that plan was defeated; so some hope, but only if we can put a permanent stop to the privatisation policy overall.

Much time now being spent on contemplation about where next after the march – Christine and Trish have a plan and are exploring calling a meeting of various foras : KONP, Peoples Assembly, 38 Degrees etc and discussing how to join forces to influence both, national and local policy. The aim has to be to stop worsening of the situation. I am caught between my desire to remain non-aligned and to join something as solo working is hard.

It seems to me that Allyson Pollock's NHS reinstatement paper with Ken Loach's advice provides a great roadmap for the future- a publicly owned, run and accountable NHS.

I have never been to St Albans, but looks like it is worth a trip to see the Roman ruins, and the oldest pub – is it Fighting Cocks? – Neil had a drink there but can't remember the name now- "If you can remember then you were not there"!

After the rally, we were entertained by an Irish Band, and there was much singing and dancing. I had to refrain from the latter as had to get my feet seen to- managed to find a chiropodist who saw me at 2030 – great to have some extended hours services, but of course I had to pay for it. We are staying at the Methodist Church tonight, and the place is pretty good- so should get some good sleep. Only 2 days to London- amazing.



Ken Loach



Getting Eric Morecambe's blessings



Great craic

Rajan Madhok

4 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