

Day 3: Ferryhill to Darlington

What a day! 930 pm and just finished the meeting at Darlington Town Hall which floored most of us – people across the ages recollecting their own and family experiences of the NHS. It all started with a 10 years old young boy, a cancer survivor, paying tribute to the great NHS for saving his life and left an 82 year old, literally choked, recalling his sibling who sadly passed away due to lack of affordable healthcare in the pre-NHS era. Story after story of the benefits of the NHS and scared of going back to the days when families were torn and people died because of not being able to access healthcare. If you ever wanted to understand the appeal of the NHS, then this was it- it has really touched lives. Emotionally charged meeting reinforcing the resolve to save the NHS, and even though I am physically shattered I am wide awake, and just proud to be a part of this march.

The day started in Ferryhill with a sumptuous breakfast (I should just give up on diet plan), with local people talking about the area and their health services. And these are deeply committed working class people and Brian Gibson, who challenged Tony Blair twice at the elections, was very upset with the betrayal by the previous Labour 'gang'. Alan Milburn, who made a lot of his very humble origins does no better and seemed to have forgotten his roots, according to this lot. Choice in health care is an illusion as they see it and they cannot understand why the brand new hospital in Bishop Auckland is mothballed. Lest one gets the impression that they were being too critical, they were very complementary of the local GP practice and appreciated the Sat/Sun opening of the surgery. So, these are people who can be objective and we would do well to listen to them.

The north-east commitment to the NHS continued to be evident throughout the day; the receptionist at the local hotel where our group of marchers stopped for a break not only offered the use of the facility, but also made a donation unsolicited.

It was great walking with Pat McCourt, County Councillor, in the morning – another deeply committed second generation Labour supporter and very interested in his area. The route passed through some of the most deprived areas, and not having been to these parts for over 20 years I was sad to hear about the racial tensions including the recent rise of the BNP in the area, which has been tackled to some extent now. Tony Blair's successor, Phil Wilson, is doing his best to create community cohesion.

My new found friend, the Painter, from yesterday, Maurice Allen, did come back with his Grandson and wife and carried the banner throughout, and there were so many others who joined this leg of the march. The march is like a magnet drawing people from across the spectrum of society and not just health workers. We were all buoyed by the constant horn tooting lorries and cars – and what caught attention was that the fancy car drivers, the 4x4 ones (as my fellow walker described), were equally loud when passing by.

(Another) Bonus of the day was meeting Joe Treasure, an author, and perhaps he can give me some tips on writing, as I try and write my 'story' of the march.

Coming to Darlington was obviously very emotional for the organisers as this is where it all started, and there was a large crowd to welcome them.

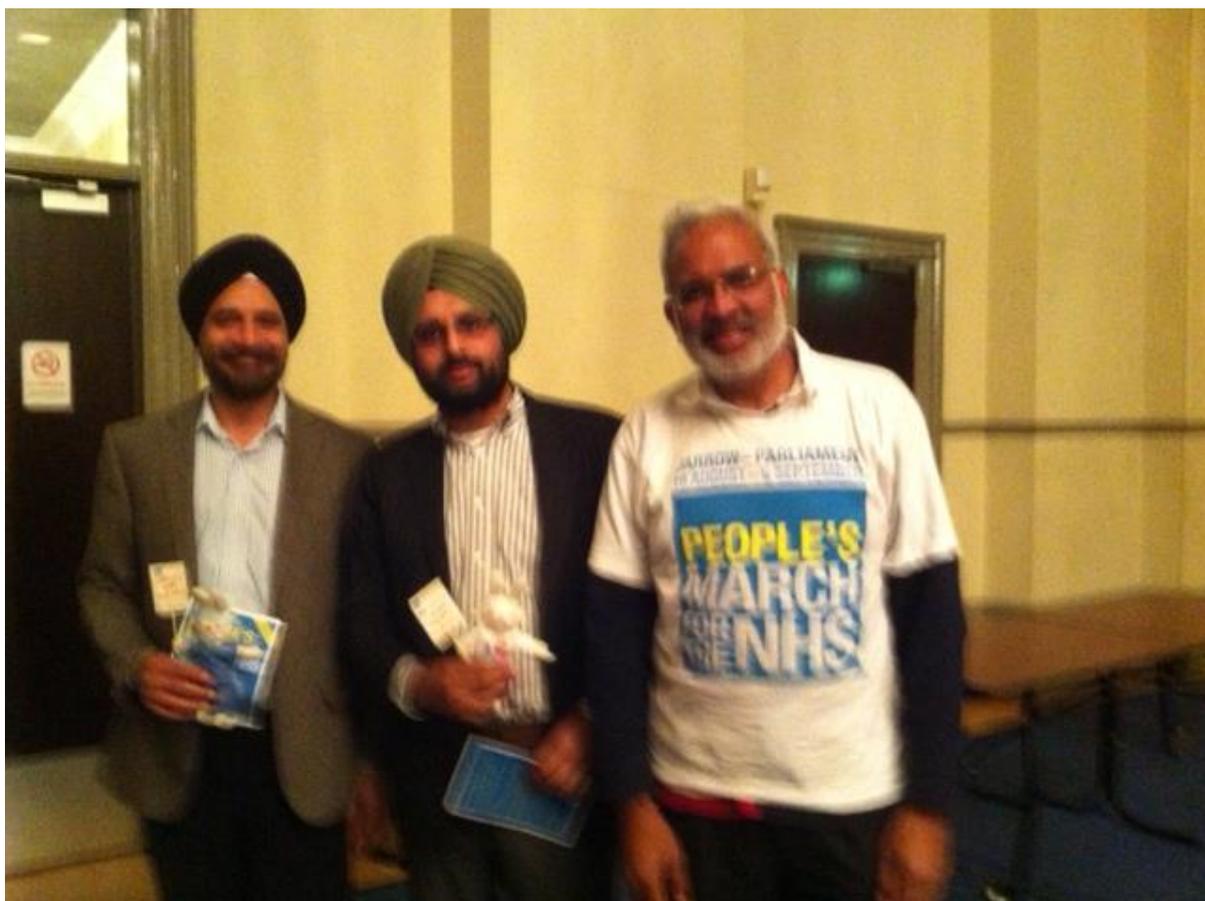
All in all, the NHS is again going to be a big issue in the elections next year. And certainly these Darlomums are not going to drop this; they are well informed and are aware that there is a short window of opportunity with TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) with its irreversible privatisation being pushed through. They are watching the politicians and aim to serve notice to those who do not support the NHS. We may yet see some accountability coming back into the Government- that makes all this effort worthwhile!

Rajan Madhok

18 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



With Gill and Sidhu in Darlington Town Hall



With Brian Gibson



Maurice Allen with his grandbairn