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Broadcast script (handwritten) re hospitals

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3590(1)

Good evening.

Last week I said something to you about S.A.'s hospital facilities. Since then the Playford Govt. has defeated in Parlt. the Labor Party's moves to have the new schedule of charges for treatment in public hospitals disallowed, and I want to talk about this matter tonight.

Under the Chifley Federal Labor Govt., the Commonwealth gave sufficient money to the States to cover the amount which the States were then getting in charges in public hospitals, plus a sum to provide for capital outlay. This was paid to the State provided public hospital treatment was free. So we got free public hospitals.

When the Menzies Govt. came to power a considerable inflation took place, so that the amount payable to the States under the Chifley scheme no longer covered what it had done under Chifley. The Menzies Govt. agreed to pay more to the States to cover the decline in the value of money, but made it a condition that that extra amount was only payable if the State Govt. changed its policies.

The Playford Govt. then re-introduced hospital charges. They didn't need to – as I shall show you in a moment – but they preferred to take up to £400,000 a year out of the pockets of the poorer people of the community in that way to taxing the people who could afford to support hospitals as a social service.

At the time Sir T. P. introduced hospital charges again he gave an undertaking that pensioners would not be charged

Last year he brought in a bid to provide the Govt. with power to make regulations prescribing new hospital charges.

[Start of page 2]

Mr. O'Halloran on behalf of the A.L.P successfully moved an amendment which provided that the regulations were subject to disallowance by Parlt. During the Parlt. recess new charges were gazetted, which provided for a change of £21/-/- per week in public wards and more elsewhere, so that S.A. public hospital charges were to be the highest in Aust.

Last week the A.L.P as a matter of urgency had the standing orders & proceedings of the house suspended to move immediately that the new charges be disallowed. The Govt said in the course of debate that they had approved a scale of rebates in cases of poor people, so that their bills for hospital treatment would be reduced. This did not satisfy the ALP as the scale of rebates is not set forth in the regulations. Once the regulations stand, the Govt could change the scale of rebates tomorrow without Parlt. being able to do anything about it. Even the scale of rebates at present approved by the Govt is iniquitous and unjust. It contains, among others, these objectionable features.

- I. The changes in maternity cases are 5/- per day higher than in general wards. As part payment against the charge of 65/- per day the Govt proposes to take the amount of maternity benefit payable by the Commonwealth Govt to the mother for the purposes of providing for the baby's layette & other requirements.
- II. Where pensioners have money saved up as against rates for their houses, or to provide for their funerals, this money will be taken.
- III. In all except the very rarest of cases, the minimum charge will [be] 10/- per day – and this will be charged to pensioners.

[start of page 3]

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- IV. If any person is insured for medical & hospital benefits, that money up to the amount specified in the regs. will be taken by the Govt.
 - V. The purpose of the rebate system is to force all people to insurers for medical benefits – although according to the Menzies Govt. pensioners were to be treated without charge & would have no need to insure, the Playford Govt insists that they pay insurance premiums from their pensions. If they do not, then it will discriminate against them & force them to pay as a minimum the amount they could have got from insurance if they had insured.
 - VI. The position of chronically ill patients is made even worse than before by the new regs., so that those who most need assistance with hospital cases will get least assistance.

Our minority Govt. has used its numbers in the house of assembly to enforce this position. But it did not need to. This State has consistently spent less of (*sic*) health, hospitals & charities than any other State. Let me give you the last figures for spending per head of population on health & hospitals by States published by the Grants Commission.

- Figures
- Hospitals – figures
- Provision of beds & nurses figures¹

If we spent to the level of the other States – since we have fewer facilities to spend the money on, we could both do without hospital charges and make some provision for improving our standards.
[start of page 4]

In fact while we were in receipt of grants commission money we could have had the needed money merely by spending it & claiming reimbursement. This Sir T.P. refused to do. So last year we lost £2,125,000 in Commonwealth Grant for State services, and Sir T.P. prefers to take it out of the poor & sick.

Labor is pledged to free public hospitals - & to give greater subsidies to subsidised hospitals so that the poor need never want for treatment.

Today under the Playford dictatorship many poor people fear to have needed treatment because of the bill with which they may be faced. This is a scandal in a 20th century community – but as was feelingly remarked by someone else recently, S.A. has the fairest 18th-century govt. in the world.

Goodnight.

¹ These figures are included in two clippings from Hansard which accompany the manuscript.

Good evening

Last week I said something to you about S.A.'s hospital facilities. Since then the Playford Govt. has ~~been~~ defeated in Parli. The Labor Party's wishes to have the new schedule of charges for treatment in public hospitals disallowed, and I want to talk about this matter tonight.

Under the Chifley Federal Labor Govt, the Commonwealth gave sufficient money to the States to cover the amount which the States were then getting in charges in public hospitals, plus a sum to provide for capital outlay. This was paid to the States, provided public hospital treatment was free. So we got free public hospitals.

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The Playford Govt. then re-introduced hospital charges. They didn't need to - as I should show you in a moment - but they preferred to take about \$200,000 a year out of the pockets of the poorer people of the community in that way to taxing the people who could afford to support hospitals as a social service.

At the time Sir T. P. introduced hospital charges again to give an indication that persons would not be charged.

Last year he brought in a bill to provide the Govt. with power to make regulations prescribing new hospital charges.

Mr. O'Halloran on behalf of the A.L.P. successfully moved an amendment which provided that the regulations were subject to disallowance by Parliament. During the Party recess new charges were gazetted, which provided for a charge of £2/1/- per week in public wards and more elsewhere, so that S.A. public hospital charges were to be the highest in Austral.

Last week the A.L.P. as a matter of urgency had the standing orders & proceedings of the house suspended to move immediately that the new charges be disallowed. The Govt. said in the course of debate that they had approved a scale of rebates in case of poor people, so that their bills for hospital treatment would be reduced.

This did not satisfy the A.L.P. as the scale of rebates is not set forth in the regulations. Once the regulations stand, the Govt. could change the scale of rebates tomorrow without Parliament being able to do anything about it. Even the scale of rebates at present approved by the Govt. is inequitable & unjust. It contains, among other things, these objectionable features.

- (i) The charges in maternity cases are 5/- per day higher than in general wards. As poor people against the charge of 65/- per day the Govt. proposes to take the amount of maternity benefit payable by the Commonwealth Govt. to the mother for the purposes of paying for the baby's clothes & other expenses.
- (ii) When persons are being sent up as against rates for burials, or to provide for their funerals, this money will be taken.
- (iii) In all except the very rarest of cases, the minimum charge will be 10/- per day - and this will be charged to persons.

iv. If any person insured for medical & hospital benefits, that way up to the amount specified in the regs, will be taken by the Govt.

v. The purpose of the whole system is to force all people to insure for medical benefits - although according to the insurance board persons who are used to insure, the Plymouth Co. insists that they pay insurance premiums for their persons. If they do not, then it will discriminate against them & force them to pay as a minimum the amount they could have got for insurance if they had insured.

vi. The position of chronically ill patients is made ~~study~~ even worse than before by the new regs, so that those who are not used assistance with hospital care will get least assistance.

Our nursing board has used its number in the house of assembly to explain this position. But it did not need to.

This State has consistently spent less of health, hospital & charities than any other State. Let me give you the last figures for spending per head of population on health & hospitals by States prepared by the Govt. Commission,

- figures.

Hospitals - figures.

Provision of beds & nurses figures.

If we spent to the level of the other States - since we have fewer facilities to spend the money on we could both do without hospital charges and maintain our standards.

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 remarked by someone else recently, S.A.
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 the world.

Goodnight,

Our ~~local~~ local hospitals are scrambling for money
 like mad - subsidies to district & community hospitals
 spent last year were -

£10 -
 £14 -
 £22 -
 £27 -
 £37 -
 £5 -
 N.S.W.
 N.C.
 S.A.

1350000
 10,183,701
 14,500,876
 12,131,122
 N.S.W.
 N.C.
 S.A.

Confidential and Subject to Revision.

H.A.—THURS. EIGHT

ASSEMBLY.— HI
ment in the past 30 years—in Queensland there are 126; in Western Australia, 159; and in Tasmania, 141. The Australian average which is taken up by our figure, is 174, and the South Australian figure is 232! There is not another State like it, and the condition of public hospital beds here on average is worse than in the other States as well. I know that the Premier may cite the building at Woodville that was erected over such a long period at such an extraordinary cost in relation to the original estimate.

Mr. Jennings—And with great publicity.

Mr. DUNSTAN—Yes, and it is not yet being fully used because of lack of trained staff. However, that does not get away from the position at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, where conditions in many wards are scandalous. No other hospital in the Commonwealth has such bad conditions as are offered there. Let me turn now to the provision of trained nursing staff: this is also informative on what the Government is doing with the small amount it chooses to spend and for which it is now charging the people of the State. In New South Wales there are 302 people to each nurse; in Victoria, 316; in Queensland, 347; in Western Australia, 251; and in Tasmania, 270. The Australian average, which was taken up by our figure (members will see that it is more than the figure of several States) was 304 people to every nurse. South Australia's figure was 401 people to every trained nurse. It is in relation to this that we are being asked now to pass a regulation on hospital charges!

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sistently treated fewer patients in proportion to population and provided fewer hospital beds and fewer trained hospital staff than any other State. In the last Grants Commission report the position is set forth clearly and at page 69 the figures for expenditure by States on health, hospitals and charities are set forth for the year 1957-58. New South Wales spent 132s. 11d., Victoria 143s. 1d., Queensland 166s. 4d., Western Australia—a claimant State—166s. 7d., and Tasmania—a claimant State—163s. 9d. The average for Australia, which was pulled down by our figure, was 143s. 5d. South Australia spent 125s. 1d. At page 122 of the appendices to the Grants Commission report the per capita expenditure on hospitals is set forth, showing that New South Wales spent 83s. 11d., Victoria 80s. 4d., Queensland 107s. 7d., Western Australia—a claimant State—106s. 3d., and Tasmania—a claimant State—94s. 3d. The average of the States was again pulled down by our figure to 87s. 10d. South Australia spent 78s. 7d. This has been the consistent attitude of this Government. It has refused to spend on hospitals the amounts that have been spent by other States and, consequently, we have fewer hospital facilities, for which people are asked now to pay. We are not spending as much on the very things for which we are seeking to charge at the rates set forth in these regulations.

Let us now consider the figures relating to hospital beds. I have quoted figures on this subject on previous occasions, but I have carefully had them brought up-to-date. The last figures published by the Commonwealth Statistician reveal that for public and subsidized hospitals in New South Wales there are 171 persons to every bed, in Victoria 221—and Victoria, it may be noted, is the State which, next to this, has had the least Labor Govern