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Title:

ALP broadcast regarding 'brochure published by the ... Liberal Party which alleges that the average Australian now is much better off than before and diagrammatically shows how much more is paid in wages now than in the time of the Chifley Government."

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A.L.P. BROADCAST. 15th AUGUST, 1960.

MR. DON DUNSTAN - MEMBER FOR
NORWOOD

Good Evening:-

In the past few weeks some of you may have seen an attractively printed brochure published by the Federal Secretariat of the Liberal Party which alleges that the average Australian is now much better off than before and diagrammatically shows how much more is paid in wages now than at the time of the Chifley Government. Pamphlets like this are remarkable for what they don't say - since the £1 today will buy about what 7/- would buy in 1948 it's hardly surprising that wages are higher in money value than in 1948 - and it's not very honest to paint a picture ignoring the fact that contrary to Mr. Menzies' promises value has flowed cut of the pound under his administration. But let me just contrast for you the position of the wage-earner and the pensioner in 1948 needing hospital treatment.

He could then go to the public wards of public hospitals in this State and get treated without charge. If he had insured himself with a medical benefit insurance scheme he could use that money on his personal needs in time of illness, and that was just, because it's an old saying but a true one, that in time of illness you don't need less money than when you ^{are} were well - you need more.

He could have these advantages because the Chifley Government had asked the State ~~Grants~~ Governments how much they were receiving per patient per day formerly in public hospitals. They then paid that amount plus a further amount to assist with hospitals expansion to the States on [^]condition they gave free treatment.

Now let's see what happened under Liberal Governments. When the Menzies Government took office in Canberra they lifted economic controls and there was an immediate and disastrous inflation. The money paid by Labor Governments would not then meet the real

costs in hospital for which the payment had been designed. So the Menzies Government said to the State Governments - we will increase the amount paid by the Commonwealth to allow for the decrease in the value of money - but only provided you make a charge in public hospitals. So it forced most State Governments into the position that they had to charge patients in public hospitals.

In South Australia, however, it was not necessary to re-impose public hospital charges. As the Playford Government provides fewer hospital facilities than any other State and spends less on health and hospitals than any other State, we had a favourable adjustment available to us from the Grants Commission which would more than cover amounts to be received from charges for public hospital treatment. But rather than spend the money and collect that favourable adjustment, Sir Thomas Playford reimposed charges in public hospitals to take hundreds of thousands out of the pockets of the poorer people of South Australia. It was apparent from the action of the Menzies Government that the Liberal party does not believe in free public hospitals and Sir Thomas was simply following his party's policy.

But then he went a step further. This year changes were introduced in the charges which are more severe than any known before. Let me give you an example.

At the time the new charges were introduced the Premier said that there was an administrative discretion to reduce the charges in cases of hardship. However, the formula upon which that discretion was to be based was never shown to the House of Assembly. The Labor Party demanded that at the very least we should be able to scrutinise it, but the Premier refused and in view of what has happened since that is not surprising.

It was suggested that if a pensioner insured himself at a cost of 9d per week with a medical benefit society, the monies from that society and the Commonwealth Government would be taken in full satisfaction of the bill for treatment in the public

hospital. The Premier said that would "normally" be the case. Liberal party members waxed eloquent on the subject. Mr. Millhouse, the member for Mitcham, suggested that a payment of 9d. per week was no hardship to a pensioner. (I may say the reaction to that statement of some pensioners who are paying over £2/-/- per week for a room and have to feed and clothe themselves and provide for all other necessities out of the remainder of their pensions was not one of blitheful accord). Mrs. Steele, the member for Burnside, said that she felt that S.A. pensioners were a self-reliant lot and would prefer paying 9d. per week to the situation in Western Australia, where the Government uses lottery monies towards hospital costs.

But you see the only case in which a pensioner really covers himself by paying 9d. a week is if his income is nothing more than the pension and he has no assets. If he has worked a little and earned income within the amount allowed by the Federal means test, his hospital bill is increased. If he or his wife have put a small amount away in the bank to provide themselves with a decent burial, his hospital bill is increased. If he has a motor car, why heaven save us, according to the State Government he is a plutocrat^{and}/his hospital bill is increased. In each of these cases, the subscription to a medical benefit society of 9d. per week will not cover his hospital bill. And if he, foolish fellow, had been so gullible as to believe the previous statements of Federal and State Liberal Leaders that ~~pensioners~~^{pensioners} would be treated free and then had gone into hospital in the last few months and not insured - why he will have a nice little packet to pay.

And what of the wage-earner. He must insure for more than 9d per week to cover himself. To get anything like full coverage he must pay, if he has a family, a tidy little sum. Most wage-earners find this hard to meet. Let them console themselves. Under Labor free hospitals were paid for by a graduated tax, so that the wealthy helped the poor and everyone in need was certain of assistance. But the great benefit which the wage-earner now has

received from the Liberal Government is that the more wealthy people are in a position easily to meet larger subscriptions to a medical benefit society and they therefore get most back from it at time of illness. To get all available Federal Government subsidy in time of illness a man must belong to a medical benefit society. But the amount you get from that society depends on upon your rate of subscription. So the ordinary wage earner instead of paying a graduated tax (small on the poor man and heavy on the more wealthy) and getting in return free hospital treatment now pays a graduated tax, must in addition pay a subscription to a medical benefit society and gets a hospital bill which is likely to be in excess of the amount of medical insurance for which he has been able to subscribe.

Now this has mean that numbers of people who are ill are now not undergoing ~~and~~ needed treatment because they dare not incur an expense for that treatment they know they will be unable to meet.

Most comparable Western countries have now provided comprehensive medical and hospital treatment schemes to remove the fear of debt ~~for~~ from times of illness. Many countries far less prosperous than our own have done so. But from a position where we were in vanguard of establishing adequate social services under Labor, we have progressed backwards at a remarkable rate to be far in the rear. But what does it matter? After all we can console ourselves that our Prime Minister is telling the world on his various peregrinations overseas that this is "Australia Unlimited".

Good Night.