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ALP Broadcast ABC (Typescript) re hospitals

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A.L.P. BROADCAST A.B.C. 2/3/59.

DON DUNSTAN M.P.

Good Evening. I want to talk to you tonight about a situation in South Australia which is the business of us all, and which affects vitally nearly every family in this State.

When anyone in your family falls ill and needs hospital treatment, you naturally expect to be able to get hospital treatment for them - the provision of public and community hospitals in the State is the community's business. At the very least the State's job is to see to the provision of sufficient public hospital beds for the needy and of specialised facilities of the more expensive kind for everyone in the State. People who are ill should not go untreated, they should not lack hospital treatment because of poverty. Yet that is what is happening in South Australia today.

Let me begin by giving you some comparative figures. According to the last figures available from the Commonwealth Statistician at the 30th June, 1956, the other States of the Commonwealth provided an average 59 public and subsidised hospital beds for every 10,000 people. That is not good - the other States find that their hospital facilities are strained to the limit. But as against that figure of 59 beds per 10,000 people in other States in June, 1956, South Australia had only 43 beds per 10,000 people. That figure is by far the worst in the Commonwealth. No other State has such inadequate hospital facilities as we. To take a fair comparison, let us cite the figures for the other two smaller States, Western Australia and Tasmania, which are, like ourselves, claimants upon the Commonwealth for a disability grant largely to help with the cost of Social Services.

In 1956, Western Australia provided 64 such hospital beds for every 10,000 people, and Tasmania, 71, as compared

with our shockingly low figure of 43 beds for every 10,000 people.

The other State Governments have all succeeded in providing far more in the way of hospitals than has the L.C.L. government here.

What has been the result to people in this State? People needing hospital treatment simply haven't been able to get it. Let me give you a few instances - workmen in my district needing to have a hernia repaired have had to wait up to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years for a bed at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. I have had pensioners in my district due for a cataract removal who have had to wait 18 months to two years for the operation from the time when it should have been done. I have had cancer victims needing surgery but forced to delay because there was no bed for them. I have had physicians in my district and honorary surgeons at the Royal Adelaide Hospital advise constituents to get in touch with me to see if I could pull political strings to get them into hospital as the doctors were unable to get them admission for urgent treatment.

This is not the first time that these matters have been raised. The Government has been attacked on many occasions for its disgraceful record on hospitals, and as a result the minister of Health, Sir Lyell McEwin, was sent overseas for ten months at public expense to study hospitals and prison administration. When he returned he blithely announced that South Australia's hospital administration was the best in the world.

You know, after some of the staff at the Royal Adelaide Hospital had recovered from the sedatives they needed to take after reading that particular pronouncement, they asked me to go down and take a look round. You go sometime, if you get the chance. You will find some wards which are mere wooden shanties. You will find some wards so overcrowded with "black" or emergency beds that there is hardly room to get down the aisle.

You will find a dispensary so poorly accommodated that it is like something out of the most purple passages of Dickens. There is no proper and effective place for keeping patients' records. The backs of some of the wards are outmoded and slummy. The facilities for nurses are inadequate and in many cases discouraging. It is little wonder that whereas on average the other States have 32 nurses for every 10,000 people, South Australia has only 25 - again the worst in the Commonwealth by far.

The Government in reply to these figures, which are irrefutable, has said that it has great plans. It is growing a little late for plans from this Government. Sir Thomas Playford has now ruled South Australia for twenty one years - his party has been in office far longer than that. The present situation is of their making - they have had ample opportunity to carry out plans ere this.

The Premier has now announced with blithe insouciance a £15,000,000 plan for South Australia's hospitals. He must think the people have very short memories. Do you remember his advertisements before the last election in 1956? He then proclaimed a huge £11,000,000 program for hospitals. It was never carried out. Let me remind you of some of the items - the £1,000,000 casualty block at the Royal Adelaide Hospital has not been reported on by the Public Works Committee. No expenditure has been authorised - not a sod has been turned nor a brick laid. The women's treatment block at the Royal Adelaide Hospital was another item - again nothing has been done. He was going to double the size of the Port Lincoln Hospital - he hasn't. He was going to provide 260 more beds at Northfield - they are not there yet. Of course, pictures are published from time to time of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Woodville - one of the slowest most slowly carried out and extravagant projects of its kind in the world. It is years behind schedule and has cost over three times its original estimate. But it should have been up, in operation, and the next major hospital started years ago.

I well remember that when I was first elected to Parliament, the present Minister for Education, Mr. Pattinson was then a private member, and repeatedly demanded of the Government that it proceed with the promised public hospital at Oaklands to serve the South-Western suburbs. Now that he is a Minister he says nothing about it, but the fact remains that the demands he quite properly made in 1952 and 1953 have been ignored and the Oaklands Hospital is not even on the drawing board.

Just as an example to test how the Government is carrying out plans for hospitals in this State, let us take the period from June, 1956 when the last figures were released by the Commonwealth Statistician to June, 1958, when the last figure for added hospital beds is available from our own Hospitals Department.

To get to the level of the other States, hospital bed provision as at 1956, we would have had to provide an extra 1,646 hospital beds. As we only had 3,617 in 1956, this meant we needed a 40% increase to give a service comparable with other States. Do you know how many extra beds the Playford Government provided in that time as against the need 1,646? 263. That's all. It wasn't even enough to keep pace with the increase in population - we now have fewer than 43 beds for every 10,000 people.

Let me now turn to the position in subsidised hospitals. Whereas other States have subsidised the expenditure of local communities generously in their efforts to erect community hospitals, the L.C.L. government in South Australia has not. As against a subsidy of 70% of total expenditure paid in N.S.W., and 48% of total expenditure in Victoria, South Australia has provided only 19.8% of total expenditure. This has meant that many country hospitals have been forced to charge wage-earners seeking hospital treatment sums which are quite beyond their capacity to pay. The result has been very real misery to many people in country areas. The people

in the South-East of this State have been particularly hard hit, and it was not surprising that the South-East Hospitals Association has protested bitterly at the lack of Government assistance.

Why is it that the Government had adopted this attitude? It has not been for lack of money. The Premier in his announcement of his plans evidently considers there is ample money available. The other States have spent the money and if they can do it, so can we. In fact, year after year the Commonwealth Grants Commission has told this State that it may spend to the level of other States on Social Services and they will re-imburse it if it used the money to bring its budgetary position to that of the other States. The fantastic situation is that we have not spent to the level of the other States, have not required in consequence the re-imbursement to put us in their budgetary position, and so have lost millions available to us for spending on Social Services if Sir Thomas Playford had only put his hand out for it.

Last year the positive adjustment available to this State for Social Services if we had budgeted in the same way as the other States, was £1,828,000. We didn't get a penny of it as the L.C.L. Government hadn't spent the money and so couldn't get the re-imbursement. The two other claimant States Western Australia and Tasmania, have succeeded consistently in spending £5/-/- per head of population per year more on social services than has the Playford Government.

Labor is determined to spend this money and get the re-imbursement. Our plan envisages:-

1. The enlargement of the Hospitals Board to make it fully representative.
2. The immediate rebuilding of the antiquated portions of the Royal Adelaide Hospital.
3. The building of additional public hospitals in the Metropolitan Area and in the country ~~max~~ to give an adequate provision for public hospital beds throughout

the State.

4. The provision of all public hospital treatment free.
5. Increased subsidies to country hospitals of not only capital but running costs.
6. The improvement of nurses' conditions so that we may attract more trainees to this vital profession.

Only Labor gets the votes in South Australia of a majority of the people, and only Labor is concerned to provide for the needs of the majority, in hospitals, as in all else.

Good Night.