

WHY THEY ARE SABOTAGING MEDIBANK

New Zealand won a partially free health service in 1938. Britain gained a national health scheme --- initially contributory on an employer - worker basis --- in 1947. Australia had to wait until 1975 for a health insurance scheme which was a half - measure compared with Britain's or New Zealand's. Now, the Fraser Government has started dismantling even this third - rate substitute for a universal free medical service.

Australian capitalism obstinately refuses to pass on to Australian workers reforms in health and welfare long ago secured elsewhere. This backwardness of ^{Australia} in the area of social welfare, compared with other relatively rich ex-British colonies and Britain itself is a result of peculiarities of development of Australian capitalism. Australia is at once a colony and a minor imperialist state. Australia exports agricultural products and minerals to richer imperialist states, while, as a reward for their submission to world imperialism, Fraser and Anthony are permitted the privilege of dictating to the semi-colonial government of Niugini, Fiji, and (increasingly) New Zealand.

Predominantly the internal Australian economy is colonial. But colonial with a difference, because Australia has a higher living standard than most colonies, a stronger working class and unusually large reserves of raw materials. Australia is the world's richest colony. That is what makes it so different that its workers are denied a decent health scheme.

Australia is too rich in minerals for imperialism to allow it to have a strong central government which might challenge imperialist domination. Imperialism must divide Australia, in order to rule it. Australia's one federal central government is deliberately weakened by the existence of six state governments which duplicate the federal government's functions at the cost of enormous expenditure, chiefly from the workers' pockets.

The universal corruption and general administrative confusion caused by too many bureaucrats running the lives of a relative handful of people is a powerful force to block social change and prevent the rise of strong central government. Money spent on such roadblocks to change is, for capitalism, money well spent. In other countries money is spent on social reforms that fall short of socialism yet go far enough to lull workers into apathy. In Australia that money goes instead into financing seven sterile bureaucracies. That is why there is no money for Medibank.

Not only does Medibank cost money that might pay bureaucrats' salaries. It would be a popular measure which would increase the power of and support for the federal government. For these reasons, Fraser has to smash Medibank. Medibank threatens everything he stands for. It has a political meaning that is more important than its implications for the treatment of illness.

The more money Fraser and Anthony spend to stop Australia having one government, a government which under a Labor majority might attack imperialism, the more they ensure that this government can only be won by revolutionary means and so can only be communist.

The reasons why Australia's health reforms are now being torpedoed are the same as the reason why Labor has won federal elections far less often than the Liberals, in spite of more or less equal voting strengths. The stakes in Australia are too high for world imperialism, and the Australian ruling class which supports it, to rely on Labor Governments to reconcile workers to capitalism by social reform instead of state repression.

Where superprofits are being made, imperialism opposes governments which reform, because the finance for reform sometimes comes out of multinationals' balance sheets. With seven governments and seven police forces, reform is nearly always impossible, and the people can be bamboozled into believing over-government is democracy and not colonial subordination. Every patriotic Australian, believes his country is too big to be pushed around by anyone else, and this patriotic lie (expressed by some ex-Marxists as the view Australia is an "advanced" country) helps the Americans and the Japanese to turn Australia into their own special quarry. When things get out of hands, the world's richest colonial country has a colonial constitution under which a head of state never elected by anyone can sack an elected government. Kerr's constitutional reserve powers are really the reserve army of International imperialism, necessary only in a colonial country with a strong working class and no real democracy.

It took only one year for Fraser to wreck Medibank because Labor failed to begin to change what was really wrong with the Australian health system. The doctor is the type of the ideal parasite. He is the local agent of multinational drug companies in the same way as Fraser and the squattocracy are local representatives of American and Japanese imperialism. So long as doctors try to run their practices in the same way as Nelson Rockefeller runs his oil wells, any health scheme which doctors administer will necessarily be sabotaged. Even before Fraser started his hatchet job on Medibank doctors were already insisting on cash payment of fees at time of consultation. What was and is needed is an attack on the power of doctors so radical that Fraser could not turn the clock back. Not only should health care be totally free, but health workers should cease to be professionals trying to get "professional" incomes but simple workers as in any other job - people who would neither make money out of illness nor give better service to the rich than to workers. An adequate preventive health service, reducing the incidence of illness and so the amount of doctors' fees, would have been the first step in this direction. Preventive health schemes do not need the same kind of expertise as doctors have, and doctors have never got such schemes off the ground, no doubt because it would cut their incomes (it would mean the the expropriation of the alcohol, tobacco and much of the food industries as well).

The Whitlam Government not only failed in this area. It also failed to recognise that most of the minor illnesses now treated by overpaid general practitioners could as easily be treated by the at present underpaid nurses who have never made money out of the healthsystem. Doctors are only needed with modern Medical technology to handle a fast diminishing number of illnesses. Doctors can and should have been shifted into specialist status and their pay be reduced to the level of the average wage. With the bulk of day - to-day health care in different hands, Fraser would have had to fight twice as hard to smash a system more popular and better organised than Medibank now is. Labor has proved incapable of achieving such a system. It can only be secured by a communist workers' and farmers' government through the expropriation of all privately owned health services, including drug companies and private hospitals.