

QUEENSLAND BROADCAST NO. 1

MEDIBANK

BROADCAST BY THE PRIME MINISTER FOR QUEENSLAND RADIO STATIONS, 23 MARCH 1975

THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS STATION HAS BEEN GOOD ENOUGH TO INVITE ME TO TALK REGULARLY TO THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND ABOUT MATTERS OF CURRENT INTEREST. I AM GRATEFUL FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY. IN THE WEEKS TO COME I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING OF WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS DOING, NOT ONLY FOR YOUR OWN GREAT STATE, BUT FOR ALL THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE.

I THOUGHT I WOULD BEGIN WITH A SUBJECT VERY MUCH IN THE PUBLIC MIND, AND IN THE HEADLINES, AT THE MOMENT - MEDIBANK. THIS IS THE NEW UNIVERSAL HEALTH INSURANCE SCHEME TO BE INTRODUCED THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA ON THE FIRST OF JULY. I SHALL TELL YOU SOMETHING OF WHAT IT MEANS IN A MOMENT, BUT FIRST LET ME EMPHASISE THIS: MEDIBANK HAS BEEN THE POLICY OF THE LABOR PARTY SINCE 1968. IT HAS BEEN ENDORSED BY THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE IN THE TWO FEDERAL ELECTIONS IN 1972 AND 1974. WE HAVE SPENT YEARS DEVELOPING THE SCHEME AND MANY, MANY MONTHS IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH INTERESTED GROUPS - DOCTORS, HEALTH FUNDS, THE STATES - WORKING OUT THE DETAILS. I BELIEVE THAT BILL HAYDEN, THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY, AND A QUEENSLANDER, HAS PERFECTED ONE OF THE BEST HEALTH SCHEMES IN THE WORLD.

THE OPPOSITION IN THE SENATE HAS TRIED HARD TO BLOCK OUR PROPOSALS BUT IT HAS NOT SUCCEEDED. THE LEGISLATION HAD TO BE PASSED AT THE JOINT SITTING OF THE PARLIAMENT LAST AUGUST. SO SIMPLY: MEDIBANK IS THE LAW OF THE LAND. THE PEOPLE WANT IT. IT IS GOING AHEAD ON SCHEDULE. AND IT IS GOING AHEAD AS PLANNED.

MEDIBANK WILL MEAN THAT AFTER 1 JULY NO ONE WILL HAVE TO PAY ANY CONTRIBUTIONS FOR MEDICAL INSURANCE TO COVER DOCTORS' BILLS. THIS INSURANCE WILL BE FREE. DOCTORS WILL BE ABLE TO TREAT ANY PATIENT, AND PATIENTS WILL BE FREE TO CONSULT ANY DOCTOR. IF THE DOCTOR SENDS HIS BILL TO MEDIBANK, PATIENTS WILL PAY NOTHING. IF THE DOCTOR PREFERS TO SEND HIS BILL TO THE PATIENT IN THE OLD WAY, PATIENTS CAN CLAIM A REFUND FROM MEDIBANK OF 85% OF THE BILL. THE PATIENT WILL PAY THE REST, BUT NEVER MORE THAN \$5 FOR ANY TREATMENT, NO MATTER HOW EXPENSIVE. YOU HEAR OUR OPPONENTS SAY THAT MEDICAL INSURANCE WON'T REALLY BE FREE AT ALL - THAT IT'S GOING TO COST THE COUNTRY SO MANY MILLIONS OF DOLLARS. WELL OF COURSE, EVERYTHING COSTS MONEY. THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT THE FUNDS FOR MEDIBANK WILL COME FROM OUR TAXES, JUST AS FUNDS FOR OTHER GOVERNMENT SERVICES - LIKE EDUCATION, PENSIONS, THE DEFENCE FORCES - COME FROM OUR TAXES. PEOPLE WILL PAY NOTHING THEMSELVES. HEALTH WILL BE A RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

WE THINK THIS IS A MUCH BETTER SYSTEM FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. IN THE FIRST PLACE IT IS SIMPLER AND FAIRER. IT WILL DO AWAY WITH A HUNDRED OR MORE SEPARATE, COMPETING, OVERLAPPING HEALTH FUNDS WHOSE ACTIVITIES HAVE OFTEN LED TO WASTE AND INEFFICIENCY. IT WILL MEAN THAT EVERYONE IN THE COMMUNITY WILL BE COVERED AUTOMATICALLY - DON'T FORGET THERE ARE NOW OVER A MILLION AUSTRALIANS WITH NO MEDICAL INSURANCE AT ALL. IT WILL MEAN BETTER TREATMENT FOR PENSIONERS AND THOSE MOST IN NEED. AND FOR EVERYONE IT WILL MEAN NO MORE WORRY OR FINANCIAL EMBARRASSMENT IN MEETING THE COST OF CONTRIBUTIONS.

I HAVE MENTIONED THE MEDICAL SIDE OF OUR SCHEME. THAT'S GOING AHEAD WHATEVER THE STATES MAY DO. THE HOSPITAL SIDE IS MORE COMPLICATED. IT DEPENDS ON WHETHER THE STATES AGREE TO CO-OPERATE WITH MEDIBANK OR NOT. IF THEY DO, HOSPITAL CARE IN GENERAL WARDS WILL COST NOTHING - THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE STATE GOVERNMENT WILL SHARE THE COST FOR EACH PATIENT. WE HAVE OFFERED THE STATES SUBSTANTIAL FUNDS FOR THIS PURPOSE.

NOW I KNOW THAT HERE IN QUEENSLAND YOU ALREADY HAVE FREE HOSPITAL TREATMENT. IT WAS A LABOR GOVERNMENT IN THIS STATE THAT KEPT YOUR FREE HOSPITAL SCHEME GOING AFTER MR MENZIES IN THE 1950'S, WITH A COUNTRY PARTY MINISTER OF HEALTH, BROKE OFF THE AGREEMENTS WHICH THE CHIFLEY LABOR GOVERNMENT HAD MADE WITH EVERY STATE FOR FREE HOSPITALS BACK IN 1947.

SO YOU MAY THINK IT DOESN'T MATTER MUCH TO QUEENSLANDERS WHETHER YOUR STATE GOVERNMENT JOINS MEDIBANK OR NOT. WELL, IT DOES MATTER. IT'S TRUE THAT YOU WOULD CONTINUE TO HAVE FREE PUBLIC WARD TREATMENT - AS LONG AS THE STATE PROVIDES IT - BUT IF QUEENSLAND JOINS THE MEDIBANK SCHEME YOUR STATE WILL BE GETTING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN EXTRA FUNDS - ABOUT \$50 MILLION A YEAR - FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. THESE FUNDS WOULD GREATLY EASE THE BURDEN ON YOUR STATE FINANCES. THEY COULD BE USED TO BUY MORE HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT OR EMPLOY MORE STAFF - THINGS WHICH QUEENSLAND HOSPITALS SORELY NEED. SO BY JOINING MEDIBANK, QUEENSLAND WILL BE MUCH BETTER OFF THAN IF SHE DOESN'T JOIN. WITH OR WITHOUT MEDIBANK, THE FACT IS THAT HOSPITAL COSTS ARE GOING TO GO ON RISING, BECAUSE HEALTH CARE EVERYWHERE IS BECOMING MORE EXPENSIVE, MORE IN DEMAND. WITH MEDIBANK, YOUR STATE GOVERNMENT WON'T HAVE TO BEAR SINGLE-HANDED THIS INEVITABLE BURDEN OF RISING COSTS. THAT MEANS MORE MONEY TO SPEND ON OTHER THINGS - SCHOOLS, ROADS, RAILWAYS, COMMUNITY FACILITIES - FOR THE BENEFIT OF QUEENSLAND PEOPLE. ALSO, UNDER MEDIBANK, PRIVATE HOSPITALS WILL BE GETTING ANOTHER \$16 A DAY FOR EVERY PATIENT. SO IT'S NOT JUST PUBLIC HOSPITALS, BUT PRIVATE HOSPITALS, THAT STAND TO GAIN.

THE STATE GOVERNMENTS ARE NOW DECIDING THEIR ATTITUDES TO THE MEDIBANK HOSPITAL PROPOSALS. TWO STATES - TASMANIA AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA - HAVE ALREADY COME IN. I HOPE QUEENSLAND WILL JOIN THEM. I WOULDN'T ENVY A STATE PREMIER WHO HAD TO EXPLAIN TO HIS FELLOW-CITIZENS WHY HE'S DECIDED TO DEPRIVE THEM OF \$50 MILLION A YEAR. DON'T FORGET: MEDIBANK WILL BE STARTING IN JULY WHETHER QUEENSLAND JOINS OR NOT. WHATEVER HAPPENS, QUEENSLANDERS WILL BE GETTING THE BENEFITS OF FREE MEDICAL INSURANCE. I WANT THEM TO GET THE EXTRA BENEFITS OF THE HOSPITAL SCHEME AS WELL. I WANT THEM TO BE FULL PARTNERS IN A SCHEME THAT MEANS BETTER HEALTH AND GREATER HAPPINESS AND SECURITY FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS.
