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STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,  
AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY ZONE 1 CONFERENCE  
LANE COVE TOWN HALL, SUNDAY 9 MARCH 1975

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THE POLITICS OF MEDIBANK

THE OPPOSITION'S THREAT TO MEDIBANK SYMBOLIZES AND ENCAPSULES THEIR WHOLE DESTRUCTIVE AND NEGATIVE APPROACH TO NATIONAL ISSUES TODAY.

1. IT PERFECTLY ILLUSTRATES THEIR CONTEMPT OF THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE AND THEIR REFUSAL TO ACCEPT THE PEOPLE'S VERDICT. LABOR'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROPOSALS WERE FIRST PUT BEFORE THE ELECTORATE IN DETAIL AT THE ELECTIONS OF 1969 - ELECTIONS IN WHICH THE LABOR PARTY GAINED 17 SEATS. THEY WERE AGAIN CENTRAL TO OUR POLICIES ON WHICH WE WON THE 1972 ELECTIONS. THEY WERE SPELT OUT AGAIN IN 1974. INDEED, THE HEALTH INSURANCE COMMISSION ACT WAS ONE OF THE SIX BILLS REJECTED IN THE SENATE ON WHICH THE LABOR GOVERNMENT WAS GRANTED A DOUBLE DISSOLUTION AFTER THE SENATE'S REFUSAL OF SUPPLY. AS THE MELBOURNE AGE SAID YESTERDAY:

"THE BROAD HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAMME IS ALREADY LAW. IT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY PARLIAMENT. IT HAS TWICE BEEN THE PRINCIPAL PLANK IN A WINNING ELECTION POLICY. IF EVER THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT HAD THE RIGHT TO CLAIM A MANDATE FOR ANYTHING IT IS FOR THE HEALTH SCHEME."

2. THE OPPOSITION'S ATTITUDE IS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF THE USE OF THE SENATE TO FRUSTRATE NOT JUST THE ELECTED GOVERNMENT BUT THE CLEAR DECISION OF THE PEOPLE. THE HEALTH INSURANCE COMMISSION IS NOW ESTABLISHED BY THE LAW OF THE LAND AS A RESULT OF THE JOINT SITTING LAST AUGUST. WHEN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE SENATE TOGETHER PASSED THE BILL INTO LAW THE OPPOSITION THEN USED ITS NUMBERS IN THE SENATE TO PREVENT PASSAGE OF THE HEALTH INSURANCE LEVY ASSESSMENT BILLS TO FUND MEDIBANK.

3. IT <sup>IS</sup> AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE WAY IN WHICH THE OPPOSITION NOW OPPOSES MEASURES WHICH THEY THEMSELVES PROPOSED OR INITIATED IN GOVERNMENT. SINCE THE JOINT SITTING THE OPPOSITION IN THE SENATE HAS TWICE EXCLUDED FROM A NATIONAL HEALTH BILL PROVISIONS WHICH WERE RECOMMENDED SIX YEARS AGO BY THE NIMMO COMMITTEE AND WHICH FIVE YEARS AGO LAST WEEK DR FORBES WHEN MINISTER FOR HEALTH SAID THAT THE GORTON GOVERNMENT WOULD ADOPT.

4. MR. SNEDDEN'S WRITHINGS AND WRIGGLINGS IN HIS EFFORTS TO RECONCILE HIS STATEMENTS WITH MR ANTHONY'S IS A CARICATURE OF LEADERSHIP. THE COUNTRY PARTY TAIL IS WAGGING THE LIBERAL WOOF WOOF. MR ANTHONY OPPOSES MEDIBANK ONLY BECAUSE HE IS DESPERATE THAT AN ELECTION BE HELD BEFORE THE NEXT RE-DISTRIBUTION CAN GUARANTEE AUSTRALIANS EQUAL ELECTORATES AS PROVIDED BY THE LAW OF THE LAND - ANOTHER PROPOSITION ENDORSED BY THE PEOPLE LAST MAY AND APPROVED AT THE JOINT SITTING IN AUGUST. IT IS QUITE IMMATERIAL TO HIM THAT HIS LIBERAL ALLIES SUFFER AS MUCH FROM THE PRESENT APPORTIONMENT AS THE LABOR PARTY.

(MITCHELL, LIB, 29.98 ABOVE THE QUOTA; ROBERTSON, LAB, 25.29 ABOVE THE QUOTA; CALARE, C.P., 16.82 BELOW THE QUOTA; HUME, C.P., 20.73 BELOW THE QUOTA; GWYDIR, C.P., 16.96 BELOW THE QUOTA.)

AND IT IS SYMPTOMATIC OF THE PRESENT STATE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY THAT IT WILL MEEKLY ACCEPT THIS DICTATION AND THIS INJUSTICE.

5. THE ATTITUDE OF THE NON-LABOR STATES ILLUSTRATES THE PHONINESS OF THEIR "STATES' RIGHTS" SLOGANEERING WHEN IT COMES TO A MATTER OF THE PEOPLE'S RIGHTS. IN N.S.W. DAILY CHARGES FOR PUBLIC WARD BEDS WERE LIFTED TO \$30, EXACTLY DOUBLE THE CHARGE IN JULY 1972. N.S.W. STANDS TO LOSE \$30 MILLION IN 1975/76 IF IT REFUSES TO OPERATE MEDIBANK.

6. THE WHOLE BUSINESS IS DESIGNED TO DRAG OUT THE DEBATE, TO OBSCURE THE BASIC ISSUE SO THAT PEOPLE WILL BECOME THOROUGHLY CONFUSED AND THOROUGHLY DISILLUSIONED. THE FACT IS THAT HOWEVER HEALTH INSURANCE IS FINANCED, HOWEVER MEDIBANK IS FUNDED, MEDICAL AND HOSPITAL TREATMENT WILL NOT COST A CENT MORE. WE HAVE TO FACE THE FACT THAT AN INCREASING PERCENTAGE OF THE NATIONAL INCOME WILL BE APPLIED TO HEALTH. IT IS IRRELEVANT WHETHER THIS IS CHANNELLED THROUGH THE PRIVATE HEALTH FUNDS OR THROUGH MEDIBANK HOWEVER FUNDED. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT RESULT IN OVERALL COST IS THAT MEDIBANK WILL BE LESS EXPENSIVE TO ADMINISTER THAN HEALTH INSURANCE ADMINISTERED BY MORE THAN 100 PRIVATE BUREAUCRACIES PRESENTLY OPERATING IN AUSTRALIA.

7. AS FAR AS THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED MEDIBANK IS THE LAW OF THE LAND. WE WILL APPLY THAT LAW AND WE WILL COMPLY WITH IT.

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