

PRIME MINISTER'S WEEKLY BROADCASTTHE REAL THREAT TO MEDIBANK

SUNDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 1975

IN MY BROADCAST LAST WEEK I MADE THE POINT THAT WHILE MR FRASER KEEPS TALKING ABOUT THE NEED TO CUT GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE, HE NEVER SPELLS OUT CONVINCINGLY WHERE THE CUTS WOULD COME FROM IF THE LIBERALS HAD THEIR WAY. I SAID LAST WEEK: "IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH IMAGINATION TO SEE WHERE THE REAL CUTS WOULD BE MADE... THEY WOULD COME FROM OUR PROGRAMS FOR BETTER HEALTH SERVICES AND HOSPITALS, FOR ADEQUATE SOCIAL SECURITY. THE PEOPLE WHO WOULD PAY FOR MR FRASER'S ECONOMIC POLICIES ARE THE POOR, THE NEEDY, THE SICK..."

I SUPPOSE I SHOULD HAVE GIVEN THE LIBERALS MORE CREDIT FOR FRANKNESS. AT THE VERY MOMENT I WAS ISSUING THIS WARNING MR CHIPP LET THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG. HE SPELT OUT QUITE CLEARLY AND UNMISTAKABLY - IN BRUTAL AND UNEQUIVOCAL TERMS - THAT IF THE LIBERALS GOT BACK INTO OFFICE THE FIRST THING THEY WOULD DO WOULD BE TO KILL MEDIBANK. THERE WAS NO HEDGING OR QUALIFICATION ABOUT IT. MEDIBANK WAS A "MONSTER". MEDIBANK WOULD BE DISMANTLED. THE OPPOSITION WOULD RETURN TO A SYSTEM OF PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE. THOSE WERE MR CHIPP'S OWN WORDS AND THEY WERE QUOTED IN ALL THE PAPERS LAST WEEKEND.

NOW MR CHIPP IS NOT JUST AN OPPOSITION  
BACKBENCHER AIRING HIS PRIVATE THEORIES. HE IS THE  
OPPOSITION'S OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN ON SOCIAL SECURITY.  
WE MUST ASSUME THAT IN SOME THINGS AT LEAST HE KNOWS  
WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT. WE MUST ASSUME THAT WHEN HE  
TALKS ABOUT MEDIBANK HE IS EXPRESSING THE OFFICIAL  
POLICY OF THE OPPOSITION. AND IN FACT HE IS STILL  
THEIR OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN ON THESE MATTERS. IT IS  
TRUE THAT HIS OPPOSITION COLLEAGUES ISSUED ALL SORTS OF  
QUALIFYING STATEMENTS AND DENIALS. MR FRASER DID  
HIS BEST TO COVER UP AND TALKED ABOUT WAYS OF "AMENDING"  
MEDIBANK "AT THE APPROPRIATE TIME". IT IS TRUE  
THAT MR CHIPP WAS HUMILIATED AT HIS PARTY MEETING ON  
TUESDAY AND FORCED TO DENY WHAT HE'D SAID ON SATURDAY.  
BUT THE DAMAGE HAD BEEN DONE. WE WERE GIVEN THE CLEAREST  
INDICATION YET OF THE OPPOSITION'S INTENTIONS, THEIR  
HATRED OF MEDIBANK, AND THE SORT OF "ECONOMIES" THEY  
WOULD MAKE IF GIVEN HALF A CHANCE.

IT IS SIMPLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR MR FRASER TO DENY WHAT HIS COLLEAGUE SAID AND HOPE THE WHOLE ISSUE WILL BLOW OVER. WHEN IT COMES TO MEDIBANK THE LIBERALS JUST CANNOT BE TRUSTED. YOU ONLY HAVE TO LOOK AT THEIR RECORD. IN THE LATE 1940s AS A RESULT OF THE CHIFLEY LABOR GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, EVERY STATE IN AUSTRALIA HAD A FREE HOSPITAL SCHEME. WHEN THE LIBERALS GOT IN, THEY BROKE OFF THESE AGREEMENTS WITH THE STATES IN THE EARLY 1950s AND MADE PEOPLE PAY FOR THEIR HOSPITAL TREATMENT IN STANDARD WARDS. THE ONLY STATE THAT KEPT ITS FREE HOSPITALS GOING WAS QUEENSLAND - AND THAT WAS DUE TO A STATE LABOR GOVERNMENT. NOW, OF COURSE, EVEN THE PRESENT DISCREDITED QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT HAS ACCEPTED THE MEDIBANK SCHEME. THEY HAVE FALLEN INTO LINE WITH ALL THE OTHER STATES WHO FOUGHT MEDIBANK FOR SO LONG. BUT WHATEVER THE STATES MAY SAY OR DO, WE CAN BE SURE THAT IF THE LIBERALS IN CANBERRA GOT A CHANCE TO DESTROY MEDIBANK THEY WOULD DO SO. THEY HAVE DONE IT BEFORE; THEY WOULD DO IT AGAIN.

THE OPPOSITION AND THE PRESS TALK BLITHELY ABOUT MEDIBANK BEING A FACT OF LIFE. THE SAME POLITICIANS AND NEWSPAPERS THAT KEPT ON DENOUNCING MEDIBANK WHEN WE WERE TRYING TO SET IT UP NOW POINT UNASHAMEDLY TO ITS VIRTUES. DOES ANYONE SERIOUSLY BELIEVE THAT THE OPPOSITION, WHICH FOUGHT MEDIBANK TOOTH AND NAIL FOR SO LONG, COULD SUDDENLY BE TRUSTED TO KEEP IT GOING? THEIR STATEMENTS ARE A TISSUE OF CONTRADICTIONS. AT FIRST MR CHIPP DENIED THAT HE HAD THREATENED MEDIBANK AT ALL. THEN HE MODIFIED THIS TO SAY THAT ONLY THE HOSPITAL SIDE WOULD BE DROPPED. SO FIRST WE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT IT WOULD ALL BE DROPPED, THEN THAT NONE OF IT WOULD BE DROPPED, AND NOW THAT ONLY THE HOSPITAL SIDE WOULD BE DROPPED. ONLY A WEEK BEFORE HE WAS CONTRADICTING HIS SHADOW MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY, ONLY A WEEK BEFORE MR CHIPP WAS FORCED TO RECONT, MR FRASER HIMSELF REACTED TO OUR BUDGET PROPOSALS WITH THE OBSERVATION - A STUPIDLY INACCURATE OBSERVATION, AS IT HAPPENS - THAT IF IT WEREN'T FOR MEDIBANK, THE BUDGET DEFICIT WOULD BE ONLY HALF AS GREAT. CAN ANY RATIONAL PERSON DOUBT THAT THE DESTRUCTION OF MEDIBANK IS VERY MUCH IN THE MINDS OF THE OPPOSITION? WHENEVER THEIR GUARD IS DOWN THEY MAKE THEIR INTENTIONS CLEAR.

THE RECORD OF LIBERAL OBSTRUCTION AND HYPOCRISY OVER MEDIBANK HAS BEEN UNBELIEVABLE. THEY FOUGHT IT AT EVERY STAGE WHEN THE LEGISLATION WAS GOING THROUGH PARLIAMENT. THE PEOPLE HAD TWICE ENDORSED THE PROPOSALS AT THE ELECTIONS IN 1972 AND 1974, YET THE OPPOSITION VOTED AGAINST THE BILLS, EVEN AT THE SPECIAL JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT WHICH WAS HELD AFTER THE DOUBLE DISSOLUTION. NOW THEY TALK ABOUT MEDIBANK BEING A FACT OF LIFE. EVEN AFTER THE MEDIBANK BILLS WERE PASSED THE OPPOSITION BLOCKED A BILL FOR A SPECIAL LEVY TO HELP FINANCE THE SCHEME. YET NOW THEY GO ON ABOUT THE COST TO THE GENERAL BUDGET. NOW THEY SAY THAT - AFTER ALL - THEY MIGHT - JUST MIGHT - LET THE LEVY PASS IF WE PUT IT UP AGAIN. THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY WANT. BUT ONE THING IS CERTAIN: IF THE LIBERALS GOT BACK INTO OFFICE MEDIBANK WOULD BE DEMOLISHED. ONE OF THE GREATEST SOCIAL REFORMS IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY WOULD BE DISMANTLED. HEALTH CARE, THE RIGHT OF ALL AUSTRALIANS, WOULD AGAIN BE A SOURCE OF WORRY AND EXPENSE AND INCONVENIENCE - A BURDEN TO THE NEEDY AND A PRIVILEGE TO THE WEALTHY.

ONE WAY AND ANOTHER IT'S BEEN A REVEALING WEEK  
IN POLITICS X EVEN IN LITTLE THINGS WE'VE SEEN THE OPPOSITION  
PARTIES IN THEIR TRUE COLOURS X THE SAME MR. CHIPP, FOR  
EXAMPLE, WAS REFUSING A WOMAN SENATOR THE RIGHT TO PLAY IN A  
PARLIAMENTARY CRICKET TEAM X OTHER LIBERALS WERE BUSY ATTACKING  
ANOTHER WOMAN IN CANBERRA - A WOMAN APPOINTED ON HER MERITS  
BY THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD TO A NEW, WIDELY ADVERTISED POSITION  
ON THE BOARD'S STAFF X HER CRIME WAS THAT HER HUSBAND ALREADY  
HAD A SENIOR PUBLIC SERVICE POSITION, SO APPARENTLY SHE  
WASN'T ENTITLED TO A JOB OF HER OWN X THEY'VE BEEN WHINGEING  
ABOUT A WOMEN'S CONVENTION IN CANBERRA X THEY'VE BEEN SABLE-  
RATTLING OVER TIMOR X IN QUEENSLAND WE'VE SEEN THE UTTERLY  
DEGRADING PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT AND PREMIER  
OVER THE SENATE VACANCY - BLACKENING THE NAME OF A RESPECTED  
CITIZEN UNDER PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE, DESTROYING DEMOCRATIC  
CONVENTIONS, DEFYING THE WISHES OF THE LIBERALS IN CANBERRA,  
AND SPLITTING THEIR OWN DISCREDITED COALITION IN THE PROCESS X  
IN NEW SOUTH WALES WE'VE SEEN THE LEWIS GOVERNMENT PLANNING  
DRASTIC CUTS IN SUBURBAN TRANSPORT SERVICES AND EDUCATION X  
THERE IS NO ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION FOR THESE CUTS X MY  
GOVERNMENT HAS REPEATEDLY OFFERED TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR NEW SOUTH WALES RAILWAYS AND HAS MADE AVAILABLE UNPRECEDENTED  
SUMS FOR URBAN PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND EDUCATION X

I LEAVE YOU WITH <sup>THIS</sup> ~~THE~~ THOUGHT: IF THE LIBERALS ARE PREPARED TO SLASH THESE ESSENTIAL SERVICES WHEN THEY HAVE THE MONEY FOR THEM, IMAGINE WHAT MR FRASER AND MR ANTHONY WOULD DO IN THE SACRED NAME OF CUTTING GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE~~X~~ THERE'D BE NO END TO THE SLAUGHTER OF ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES. - HEALTH, EDUCATION, HOUSING, TRANSPORT, WELFARE~~X~~ THE DESTRUCTION OF MEDIBANK WOULD BE ONLY PART OF THE STORY~~X~~ WE SHOULD KEEP THESE THREATS IN MIND WHEN THE LIBERALS ASSURE US THAT MEDIBANK IS A "FACT OF LIFE."

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