

# An exchange on “Medicare bill marks major step in destruction of government health plan for US seniors”

5 December 2003

*Below we post an exchange with a reader about our November 26 article, “Medicare bill marks major step in destruction of government health plan for US seniors” by Shannon Jones and Barry Grey.*

Dear Mr. Jones & Mr. Grey:

I read your article and found your perspective interesting. But, I am in complete opposition to your quote at the end of the story:

“A basic element of its program must be the establishment of health care as a social right. This means taking the profit out of health care by removing it from the control of billionaire owners and investors and transforming the insurance giants, health care monopolies and drug companies into public utilities under the democratic control of the working people.”

How is health care a social right? How in the world can you take profit out of health care? Who would do it if there we no profit? Certainly not graduates from top medical schools. That is who I want checking my heart or kidneys. There is no motive for anyone to be in health care if there is no profit. We all have families to feed, children to raise and send to college, and lives to live and enjoy. These things are not free. Think how incredibly expensive these programs would be if the government ran them all. The politicians I see and read about can’t agree on when to have a coffee break, much less how to run a national health care, insurance, and prescription drug business. I think if there were less government managed programs and less government intervention into things, *everything* would be less expensive. And, if there were less lawyers suing doctors and insurance companies for frivolous matters, *all health care* would be less expensive.

I thank you for writing your article; I always enjoy reading issues from differing perspectives.

CC

Dear CC,

Thank you for your comment on the article posted on the *World Socialist Web Site* about the Medicare bill. I am glad that you found it interesting.

You ask, “How is health care a social right?” Of course it currently isn’t a social right. In America, unlike most of the advanced industrial countries, health care is a privilege for those who can afford to pay. However, many things we now consider rights, including such elementary things as free speech and the right to vote, were not considered rights in earlier periods. These rights were won through struggle. However, the right to vote doesn’t count for much if your family doesn’t have a home or your kids can’t get medical treatment or a decent education. Therefore we advocate a bill of social rights for the working class encompassing such things as employment, housing, health care and education.

You object to the proposal to take the profit out of health care by taking it out of the control of the billionaire owners. You write, “How in the world can you take profit out of health care?” You continue, “There is no motive for anyone to be in health care if there is no profit.”

It seems to me you may be confusing two things. The WSWWS does not propose that doctors, nurses and other health care workers not be paid. That is not what we mean by taking profit out of healthcare. We oppose having the market determine who receives health care in the United States and the quality of that health care. Currently, those who are not able to pay are not able to get treatment or receive inferior treatment. As a consequence millions are subject to unnecessary death or illness. We propose to change this state of affairs by

having society as a whole take on the responsibility for providing health care. Insurance, the operation of the major hospitals, drug companies and research laboratories would be run as public utilities, under the democratic control of the working class. Doctors, nurses, medical technicians and others would continue to receive their salaries and new staff employed. However, the system would operate on a different axis. Instead of the driving force being the enrichment of the owners of the giant health insurance firms, the drug companies, etc., the driving force would be human need—the prevention and curing of illness.

I can't agree with your contention that health care services would become "incredibly expensive" if the "government ran them all" rather than private enterprise. Studies show an enormous reduction in costs associated with billing and paperwork through having a "single-payer" system, such as Medicare. The drive for profit encourages enormous waste in health care and the needless duplication of services, not to say price gouging by drug companies.

I share your apprehension over the prospect of the current gang of politicians running health care. The Democrats and Republicans have shown themselves through their actions to be the enemies of ordinary working people and the friends of the drug companies, insurance firms and corporate monopoly in general. That is why we feel the first step to achieve a more rational and just organization of society is the construction of a new political party, a party based on defending the interests of the working class, the vast majority, not the billionaires.

Shannon Jones



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