

Health care is a social right, not a privilege for the rich

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Last week's three-day argument before the US Supreme Court on the Obama administration's health care law was a demonstration of right-wing, pro-corporate politics on both sides of the official "debate." Whether Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, all the big business politicians uphold the interests of profit-driven medicine, including the drug monopolies and giant insurance companies.

The Obama administration defended its reactionary "individual mandate" penalizing what it called "free riders," i.e., low-paid workers who must resort to using emergency rooms because they cannot afford health insurance, and presented the new law as vital to cutting costs for both corporations and the government. One of its allies in the liberal wing of the high court, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, made the revealing comment that the goal of the law was "to preserve a role for the private sector, for the private insurers" in the health care system.

The right-wing opponents of the Obama health care reform portrayed the latter as a "big government" social welfare scheme, and even, farcically, as a step towards socialized medicine. Their allies in the right wing of the Supreme Court suggested, particularly in their comments during the third day of argument, that they might use the case as an opportunity to attack the constitutionality of long-established social programs such as Medicaid, Medicare and even Social Security.

If the legislation is upheld by the court and fully implemented, as many as 20 million workers could lose their employer-based health insurance, as corporations dump workers into the state insurance exchanges to be set up under the Obama plan, according to the findings

of a study published in March. If the legislation is overturned, the same process will continue in a different form, as corporations simply slash benefits and eliminate health care for both retired and active workers.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the entire framework of the official discussion of health care. Revolutionary developments in science and technology mean that modern medicine is able to greatly extend and improve human life. For the capitalist system, however, this is considered a problem and not an advance. Workers are living too long, well past the age of retirement, when they cease producing profits for the capitalists.

This system's "solution" is to extend the retirement age and compel workers to continue working longer, while at the same time cutting back on the availability of technology and high-quality medical services for working people. Meanwhile the super-rich can use their wealth to command whatever health care resources they require.

The 2012 elections are being conducted under entirely false pretenses by both the major parties. The Democrats and Republicans agree that federal and corporate spending on health care services must be radically slashed, but each party is running in the elections on the claim that only the other party favors such cuts.

The Republicans won the 2010 congressional elections at least in part by denouncing cuts in Medicare that were a key component of the Obama health care program. They then proceeded to introduce

proposals to end Medicare entirely and replace it with a privatized program that would have strict cost ceilings and leave tens of millions without adequate coverage.

The latest Republican budget calls once again for privatizing Medicare, while claiming that this is the only way to “save” the program from fiscal crisis. Meanwhile, Barack Obama is basing his reelection campaign in large measure on demagogic denunciations of the Republicans for seeking to end Medicare and carry out draconian cuts in Medicaid as well.

However, as a lengthy report in the *New York Times Magazine* last Sunday documented, Obama and the Republicans already agreed to drastic cuts in Medicare and Medicaid during last summer’s talks on the federal budget—\$360 billion in cuts over the next ten years, and a total of more than \$1.5 trillion cuts over a 20-year period. The White House also reportedly signed off on raising the age eligibility for Medicare benefits.

The two parties will resume budget talks after the charade of this year’s elections, under conditions where the cuts already proposed will become the down payment on even more savage attacks on the right of working people to receive adequate health care.

Working people should oppose all cuts in Medicaid, Medicare and other vital social programs, and demand the expansion of health care services for all, not their restriction and crippling. More than 50 million people in the US have no health insurance, and another 25 million are underinsured, and could face bankruptcy in the event of a serious health crisis. Tens of thousands die each year because they have no health insurance and see a doctor too late, or not at all.

The solution to the health care crisis lies in putting an end to the privately owned health care corporations, which rake in \$200 billion a year in profits from human suffering, and establishing socialized medicine, as part of the socialist reorganization of economic life as a whole.

The Socialist Equality Party insists that health care is a social right. This means an end to medicine-for-profit and the establishment of free, high-quality state-run

health care for all. This must include the right to preventive care, prescription drugs, mental health care and advanced tests and procedures. A multi-billion-dollar program must be launched to train new doctors and other health care providers and establish new facilities to meet the needs of all. Existing personal debt accumulated through massive health care expenses must be abolished.



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