

Editorial

## The Issue of Rights in a Modern Society

Do Canadians have a right to a first-class health care system? This is a question that did not even appear on the agenda of the recent first ministers meeting on fixing Canada's ailing health care system. Instead, the only issues raised were questions of which level of government would contribute what proportion of the costs and how the rising costs of health care can be met without raising taxes. As a result, nothing was solved and the crisis of the Canadian health care system will continue to deepen and broaden, regardless of how much money may or may not be thrown at it.

There is no doubt that Canadians are receiving substandard levels of health care given the enormous wealth which is being produced by the economy. Cutbacks in funding for health care since the early 1990s are partially responsible for this situation, but there are other factors as well. The cost of prescription drugs has skyrocketed over the past 20 years, as have the salaries of

doctors. Meanwhile, waiting lists for many medical procedures have grown and hallway medicine has become a chronic problem.

If Canada were a truly modern society, the right of its citizens and residents to the most advanced levels of medical care would be a central concern of all levels of government. From this starting point, every obstacle to achieving this goal would be tackled and overcome. If the price of pharmaceuticals was identified as an obstacle, then the pharmaceutical companies would be expropriated and the pharmaceutical industry would be re-organized to provide low-cost drugs to Canadians. If a shortage of doctors and other health care professionals was identified as an obstacle to providing Canadians with the level of health care to which they are entitled, then that problem would also be tackled and solved, primarily by train-

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Commentary

## The First Ministers Meeting on Health Care

A motley crew gathered in Ottawa last week, supposedly to solve the problem of health care for Canadians. Described by reporters as one of the most acrimonious first ministers' meetings in over two decades, the health care conference had all the drama and intrigue of a soap opera. There were broken alliances, back-room negotiations after public discussions, all-night bargaining sessions and the stormy exit of Alberta premier Ralph Klein, who left early to return to Alberta for pre-election campaigning.

Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams (nicknamed Danny Millions in his home province and said to be personally on very good terms with Prime Minister Paul Martin, a fellow millionaire) described the federal government's health care offer as a "disgrace" and called the conference a farce, while federal Health Minister Ujal Dosanjh floated around giving interviews proclaim-

ing the talks were going fine, and Paul Martin spoke a great deal and said very little.

As expected, the provinces and federal government have come to a last minute agreement on health care, including a separate agreement between the federal government and Quebec. All parties are claiming the deal, which will see a few billion dollars more than previously budgeted flow to the provinces for health care spending over the next six years, is an historic advance for Canadians.

Absent from the deal is the creation of a national pharmacare program, which the provinces had originally pushed for. Also absent is federal control over how health care dollars are spent, which is something the federal government had been pushing for.

Given Canada's aging population and the increas-

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## The Demand for the Regulation of the Monopolies is a Demand of the Monopoly Capitalists Themselves

Within the movement against neo-liberal globalization many different “solutions” are presented to the problem of a world dominated by monopoly capitalism. Many of these “solutions” are calls for various social democratic reforms, most centering around the need to regulate the way in which monopoly capitalists behave. Whether these are straightforward calls for trade and investment regulations or are disguised as “revolutionary” demands that the monopolies be curbed or that their rights should be restricted, they all amount to the same thing - a demand that governments and international agencies should regulate how the monopolies interact. In this way, an illusion is promoted that the main problem with monopoly capitalism is its arrogance and lack of appreciation for the damage which is done to ordinary people by the investment and trade decisions of the monopoly capitalists. Things would be much better, this position asserts, if only the monopolies could be forced to take into consideration the interests of the people.

Those who present such “solutions” are proposing the reconciliation of irreconcilable interests. They are suggesting that capitalism could be made to work better if only governments would pass legislation forcing the monopoly capitalists to curb their greed or limiting the degree of monopolization in a particular industry. This position is patently absurd; the capitalist system is based on the maximization of capitalist profit, not on the premise of creating a better world for everyone. Monopoly capital cannot and will not accept any restrictions on its right to maximize profits. Furthermore, Marx proved that competition necessarily leads to monopoly, so even if these demands were enacted and a greater degree of competition were achieved through legislation, ultimately this would lead to even greater concentration of capital and decreased competition. This is precisely what happened with the deregulation of the airline and telecommunications industries.

However, this does not mean that monopoly capitalism rejects government regulation of competition. Far from it. One of the main reasons for the subordination of the capitalist state to the most powerful monopolies is its ability to regulate the relations between the monopolies. The monopoly capitalists use the state to enact regulations which benefit them and restrict the rights of their competitors. For example, today the most pow-

erful monopoly groups in the United States and Europe are attempting to use international institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as various national governments to establish a system of regulations which restrict the rights of other monopoly groups. For example, the monopoly capitalists who dominate American agriculture are demanding not just the restriction of monopoly right in the case of the Canadian Wheat Board, but the elimination of its monopoly altogether.

In other words, the demand for the restriction of monopoly right is not a revolutionary demand; it is a demand which originates with the monopoly capitalists, themselves, and which emerges out of the inter-capitalist rivalries and competition. This is the case, for example, with the demands that the government bail out the auto and steel industries. Those who are giving such calls are actually asking the working class and people to line up on the side of one group of monopolies against other groups of monopolies. In most cases, it is a demand for bourgeois nationalism.

The main problem with monopoly capitalism is not its monopoly nature. In fact, under socialism monopolies will not be eliminated, but expanded. Nor is the main problem the arrogant and dictatorial way in which the monopoly capitalists behave. This is merely a feature of capitalism and a reflection of the underlying property relations. The main problem with monopoly capitalism is that, while it has socialized the process of production to unprecedented levels, the ownership of the means of production remains private, along with the appropriation of the fruits of production. This problem gives rise to extreme anarchy of production and to large-scale destruction of the productive forces, as well as many other social ills.

What is the solution to this problem? There can be only one solution and that is the expropriation of monopoly capital and the transformation of private ownership into public ownership. However, that is only half of the solution; the other half is the democratization of the political institutions in such a way that the people can actually exercise control over the enormous pool of capital that they collectively

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## Commentary

## Kerry Pledges to Implement Bush's Middle East Agenda

As the U.S. presidential election draws closer, the Democrats are having a harder time than usual differentiating themselves from the Republicans, U.S. pollsters report. This is certainly the case with foreign policy, where Democratic nominee John Kerry has proposed an agenda many pundits have dubbed "Bush-lite" – the same policies of pre-emptive military strikes, escalating intervention in so-called rogue states or failed states and occupation. Kerry, however, promises to do all of these things with more support from American allies around the globe and with the sanction of the United Nations.

On Israel, Kerry has gone to great lengths to state that his policies would go just as far as Bush in negating the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination than George W. Bush. He has his brother, a convert to Judaism, campaigning on his behalf to explain Kerry's heartfelt commitment to Israel and unwavering support of Israeli policy.

In an article that appeared in the August 27 issue of *The Forward*, the largest Jewish newspaper in the U.S., Kerry writes that neither America nor Israel are secure while "Israel, the one true democracy in the region, remains the victim of an unrelenting campaign of terror." Besides pledging to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli sentiment (which he refers to as if they are one and the same), he defends Israel's construction of a separation wall, one which cuts into the Occupied Territories. He writes: "I believe that we must stand with Israel, supporting our ally's right to build a security fence and to allow its own Supreme Court -

not the International Court of Justice - to address the issue of the route of the fence. The fence has proven its value as an anti-terror measure." This echoes comments he made in July, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled Israel's construction of the fence through parts of the Occupied Territories was in violation of international law.

Kerry's claim that the Israeli Supreme Court has jurisdiction over the West Bank and Gaza is absurd. Under international covenants adopted since the end of the Second World War, including the Geneva Convention, international courts have complete jurisdiction over issues affecting people living under occupation. In fact, one of the reasons for the establishment of the ICJ in 1946 was to ensure that member states of the United Nations respected international law in their dealings with other states and with people living in colonies or under occupation.

Since its creation almost 60 years ago, the ICJ has delivered only 79 judgments on disputes ranging from land and maritime boundary disputes and questions of territorial sovereignty to the non-use of force and the non-interference in the internal affairs of states. The ICJ has also delivered judgments on diplomatic relations, hostage taking, the right of asylum, nationality, guardianship, rights of passage and economic rights.

In the same article, Kerry also declares there must be new Palestinian leadership in order for there to be peace in the region. "... new Palestinian leadership is required, as Yasser Arafat has proven himself not to be a partner for peace. As president, I will work with the Palestinian community to empower new, responsible Palestinian leadership committed to a permanent end to terror and the promotion of democracy. I will ensure that allies are united in this effort, not working at cross-purposes by propping up a failed Palestinian power structure."

This statement is an assertion that the Palestinian people do not have the right to choose their own leadership or their own system of governance. Essentially, his comments represent a negation of Palestinian sovereignty, and are a carbon copy of the current Bush administration's policies.

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own. In other words, the solution to the problems of monopoly capitalism is to replace it with socialism.

Those who are advocating the reform of monopoly capitalism and various restrictions on the rights of the monopoly capitalists are actually suggesting that there is an intermediate stage between capitalism and socialism. They are suggesting that a stage of monopoly capitalism can exist in which the laws governing the economy are partially the laws of capitalism and partially the laws of socialism. The promotion of such nonsensical illusions does serious harm to the revolutionary movement.

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ing doctors who are genuinely concerned about the health of society.

Instead, we witness a debate in which everyone publicly professes concern for the well-being of Canadians, but behind closed doors they advance the interests of the big pharmaceutical companies, the medical supply companies, the American health care monopolies trying to break into the Canadian “market” and various other financial interests. Even within the various social organizations which advocate for improvements to Canada’s public health system, the most that is demanded is that the interests of people be put ahead of the interests of the monopolies that dominate the health care industry.

The point, however, is that Canadian society is not a truly modern society, because, while it pays lip service to various human rights and to the right of Canadians to health care, in practice it recognizes only the right of the capitalists to maximize their profits. A society which is based on the recognition of the rights of capital cannot possibly recognize the rights of its citizens. These rights are irreconcilable; either people have rights or capital has rights, but there can be no society in which the rights of both exist together, regardless of which is supposedly given preference.

Until this problem is addressed by Canadians, neither the problems of the health care system nor any other problem confronting people can be sorted out. These problems are actually caused by the fact that Canadian society is organized to serve the interests of the monopoly capitalists, which means that health care and other social services are also organized to serve the interests of the monopoly capitalists and not primarily to provide Canadians with a level of health care consistent with the needs of the population.

During the 1960s and 1970s the monopoly capitalists needed a constant supply of new construction projects and guaranteed markets for health-related products in order to maximize their profits. Therefore, governments increased spending on health and education. However, as more and more production is shifted to low-wage countries and more sophisticated ways have been developed to transfer money directly from government treasuries to the monopoly capitalists, the needs of the monopoly capitalists have changed. As a result, governments at all levels in Canada have adopted neo-liberal, anti-social policies that serve the new needs of monopoly capital. There is every indication that this trend will continue until such time as Canadians assert their human right to adequate health care by settling scores with monopoly capital.

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ing shortage of primary care doctors, nurses and other health professionals, it is unlikely this much-heralded health care deal will solve any problems. Indeed, the moneys committed under the first six years of the deal are not even sufficient to keep existing problems at bay.

More and more, the histrionics over health care seem designed to convince Canadians there is no solution for the health care crisis without either bankrupting the public treasury or moving to a two-tier health care system. The question of whether or not Canadians have a right to a public health care system is not even posed – no wonder, then, that survey after survey has found Canadians have no confidence in politicians to solve the problems in the health care field.

***In Memoriam: Cec Muldrew***

Cec Muldrew, a long-time educator and activist for peace and social justice passed away on September 6 at the age of 81.

Cec served in the Canadian Air Force during the Second World War and his experiences led him to the conclusion that such wars should never be allowed to happen again. Over the next several decades, he came to the conclusion that the source of war was not human nature but imperialism, and he supported numerous anti-imperialist causes. Cec remained an indefatigable fighter for a better society right up until his death. His energy and non-sectarian spirit will be greatly missed.

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**Editor: Ken Kaltornyk**

**To contact the Manitoba Branch of CPC(M-L):**

**Fax: 477-6741**

**Email: [mrc-cpcml@mts.net](mailto:mrc-cpcml@mts.net)**

**Internet: [www.modern-communism.ca](http://www.modern-communism.ca)**

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