

Editorial

Canada Needs a Real Public Health Care System

The recent agreement between the federal and provincial governments on the future of Canada's health care system is being touted as having reaffirmed the commitment of all levels of government to maintaining Canada's public system of health care. At the same time, privatization of various aspects of health care, especially support services, is at an all-time high. This raises the important questions of what exactly is the nature of Canada's health care system and is it as "public" as is claimed.

Looking at this issue objectively, the first thing that becomes obvious is that the only truly "public" aspect of Canada's health care system is the payment for services. Medicare is not a system of public health care; it is merely a public health insurance plan. It transfers payment for most medical services from individuals to a publicly-owned insurance agency. Even so, there is a large range of medical services which are not funded by Medicare and are paid for either by individuals or by private health insurance

agencies.

The providers of health care in Canada are, for the most part, private entrepreneurs. This is certainly the case with most doctors, specialists and the vast majority of medical clinics. Only a small number of medical clinics are publicly-owned. However, most, though not all, hospitals are publicly-owned. This is a result of the fact that hospitals generally require a large capital investment and, at least in Canada, have never been particularly profitable. There is a long tradition in Canada of the nationalization of essential but unprofitable businesses, such as railways, electricity generation systems and public utilities. Hospitals are also in this category.

However, while some aspects of Canada's health care system, such as hospitals, may be publicly-owned, not-for-profit institutions, the same cannot be said for the health care system as a whole. In fact,

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Israeli Aggression in Gaza Strip

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is using his pledge to withdraw from the Gaza Strip as the pretext for the latest all-out attack on the people of Gaza. Launched at the end of September, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) operation, code named Days of Penitence, was supposed to target those involved with suicide attacks against Israeli civilians. As has been the case with every other IDF "targetted" operation, the number of Palestinian civilian casualties has been high – estimated at over 100 in the past three weeks. This includes some 30 youth and young children.

In one incident, which set off a storm of protest around the world, as well as from certain Israelis, an IDF company commander shot a 13-year-old Palestinian girl repeatedly. The girl, Iman Alhamas, was shot, according to eyewitness accounts, after she fled in terror when she was ordered by an IDF soldier to step away from her school bag. According

to the reports of his own subordinate, after the girl was shot by troops and had fallen to the ground, the IDF commander approached her body and shot her several times at close range. The commander denies the charges and says the girl was killed by a round of fire from his troops. Iman's bag was, in fact, full of school books – she was on her way home from school at the time.

The IDF subsequently suspended the company commander, although IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon ruled that there was no "ethical problem" with his conduct. The IDF has accepted the commander's version of the events, but suspended him because of what was described as his failings as a leader and the breakdown of relationships between the commander and his troops.

Many Israelis were outraged by Iman's death and public pressure has led to the establishment of a

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Revolutionary Reforms - A Program for Political Renewal

In the last issue of *Modern Communism* we discussed a program for economic renewal and various demands within such a program which would constitute revolutionary reforms. One of the central issues discussed was the necessity for any program of revolutionary reforms to begin with the expropriation of monopoly capital. Any program which falls short of expropriating monopoly capital and which is satisfied with curbing or restricting the monopolies is, intentionally or otherwise, a program of support for the *status quo* and, therefore, not a revolutionary program. Similarly, any program which confines itself to economic issues and does not include measures for democratic renewal cannot be considered a revolutionary program.

The political system of any country is designed to keep political power in the hands of those who control the economy. In Canada, the monopoly capitalists control the economy and they also control the entire political process. They do so in various ways, ranging from control of the mass media to outright bribery and corruption. However, the main method of controlling the political process is the system of government by political parties.

Political parties emerged out of the bourgeois revolutions in England and France as vehicles for the advancement of the collective interests of the various classes contending for power. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the British perfected the system of government by political parties which is almost universal today. During the entire nineteenth century in Britain, there existed a vigorous struggle for universal male franchise. It was clear to the British ruling class from the beginning that if universal male franchise were granted the British working class would take control of the political institutions in Britain and use those institutions to wrest control of the economy away from the capitalists. Eventually, they came up with a clever solution - the system of government by political parties. In this system, nominal control of the political institutions was handed over to political parties which participated in general elections. (Of course, real control remained in the hands of the big capitalists through their control of the state apparatus - the police, courts and armed forces.) In this way, the capitalist rulers only had to control the leaders of the political parties in order to control parliament, rather than having to control a majority of the elected officials. Once this system was perfected, it became safe for the capitalist ruling classes of various countries to grant first universal male franchise and later

universal franchise of all adult citizens. The political parties became the gatekeepers, the main method of keeping political power out of the hands of the people.

Renewal of the political process means the creation of mechanisms through which people can contest the power of the capitalist elite and come to power themselves; in other words, creating mechanisms through which people can exercise sovereignty themselves. This requires that control of the political process be taken out of the hands of the political parties and put in the hands of the electorate. The electorate must have the right to select and elect representatives, something which is currently monopolized by the political parties. Various measures must also be adopted to ensure that elected representatives remain accountable to the electorate and not to the leaders of political parties. Such measures could include the right to recall, the right of the electorate to initiate legislation and the right of the electorate to decide the most important issues through referenda. However, none of these measures means anything so long as control of the political process remains in the hands of the political parties.

One of the demands being pushed by many political forces at this time is that a system of proportional representation replace our current first-past-the-post electoral system. Is proportional representation a revolutionary reform? Since most countries in the world have already adopted some form of proportional representation and control of those countries remains firmly in the hands of the capitalist ruling elites, it can only be concluded that proportional representation is not a revolutionary reform. This is because it addresses only part of the problem, the problem that the first-past-the-post system results in elections which do not reflect the popular vote. Some parties elect far more members than their popular vote would warrant, while others elect far fewer members. Proportional representation ensures that the political parties are represented in parliament more or less in proportion to their popular vote. However, proportional representation does not address the problem that the political parties remain in control of the political process. Since these parties are the main mechanism by which political power is kept out of the hands of the people, proportional representation is decidedly not a revolutionary reform. In fact, in is quite conceivable that proportional representation may actually strengthen the control of the capitalist ruling elite

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Part 3: State Terrorism and Imperialism

The use of terrorism by states against their own populations and against other peoples around the globe was systematized in the twentieth century by the Nazi movement in Germany. During the Weimar Republic, the Nazi Party's paramilitary wing would use violence against political opponents and targeted groups. When Adolf Hitler assumed power in 1933, police power was concentrated in the hands of the SS, a private army established by Hitler. The SS developed a state terror apparatus which was responsible for the mass murder within Germany of Jews, progressive people, homosexuals, the disabled and others.

The term "state terrorism" was most likely coined by German communists, who felt it was the most accurate description of the new Nazi regime. They used the term repeatedly in their writings to warn of the dangers fascism posed for the peoples of the world.

During this period, the big imperialist powers were trying to curry favour with the fascists in the hope that they would defeat the communists in Europe. In fact, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain described as "terrorists" the internationalist volunteers who flooded to the defence of the Spanish people during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. He also dismissed the concept of state terrorism out of hand, something the U.S. does to this day. (The imperialist powers have, however, all accepted the notion of state-sponsored terrorism, which they have used dozens of times since the Second World War to overthrow governments of their choosing.)

Despite attempts by the imperialist powers to reject the term, state terrorism is now accepted as an appropriate description of the use of violence against a national population, committed either by a national or colonial government or its proxy.

State terror is usually carried out directly, by military or security forces. However, the U.S. is infamous for its support of paramilitary organizations, often known as death squads, which have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people throughout Latin America, Asia and Africa.

For example, the U.S. provided direct military and financial aid to the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. First Pinochet received assistance in overthrowing the democratically-elected government of Salvador Allende. Then, trained and equipped by the U.S., Chilean military and paramilitary groups hunted down and killed supporters of the Allende government. Amongst many others, this included the assassination

of the former Chilean ambassador to the U.S., Orlando Letelier, who was killed in Washington, D.C. by a car bomb. During his reign, Pinochet is estimated to have ordered the killing, torture and disappearance of thousands of Chileans, all with the support of the U.S.

In fact, throughout Latin America the U.S. trained and equipped the death squads responsible for massacres, bombings and assassinations of tens of thousands of people. In Nicaragua, funding for the paramilitary Contras was financed by the U.S. through arms sales, while the death squads in El Salvador were trained by the U.S. at the School of the Americas in Georgia. So many Latin American revolutionaries, workers and youth "disappeared" during the 1960s and 70s that the United Nations formed a Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances in 1980 to investigate the global phenomenon.

Without a doubt, most of the victims of state terrorism in the twentieth century have been revolutionaries or progressive people – and there are endless examples to back up this contention. Besides Latin America, where investigations in six different countries (Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic) unearthed conclusive evidence of U.S. direct or indirect participation in acts of terrorism against civilian populations, imperialist states have also sponsored or committed acts of terror in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

In Asia, between 1965 to 1969, one million members and supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) were killed, in what was described by the Suharto dictatorship which carried out the assassinations as an "anti-communist pogrom". Suharto's military was financed, equipped and trained by the U.S. After eliminating the communists, Suharto embarked on terror campaigns to oppress the struggles of several national groups within Indonesia, including in Sumatra, East Timor and West Papua.

In the Middle East, the Shah of Iran presided over one of the bloodiest dictatorships of the region, systematically killing and torturing any opponents. The Shah, supported by both the U.S. and Britain, was so hated that after he fled the country in January of 1979, tens of millions of people poured into the streets to celebrate.

To be continued.

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military police investigation into the incident. While the investigation could take several weeks or even months, the IDF has confirmed the commander will be reposted to other duties by the end of October. At the same time, IDF forces continue to maintain that the death of innocent civilians, including youth and young children, are regrettable accidents.

However, Israeli writer Gideon Levy has noted that with close to 600 Palestinian youth and children killed since the start of the second *intifada*, this explanation simply doesn't cut it. "No tortuous explanation by the IDF Spokesman's Office or by the military correspondents about the dangers posed to soldiers by the children, and no dubious excuse by the public relations people in the Foreign Ministry about how the Palestinians are making use of children will change [the fact that] an army that kills so many children is an army with no restraints." Israelis, he wrote, "all have the blood of hundreds of Palestinian children on our hands."

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Canada's health care system generates enormous profits for very definite sections of the capitalist class – the pharmaceutical giants, manufacturers of medical equipment and supplies, etc. The profits of these companies are higher than any other section of capital. Not coincidentally, the fastest-rising costs in the Canadian health care system are pharmaceuticals and equipment. In fact, these rapidly-rising costs are one of the main reasons that the Canadian health care system is currently in crisis.

Canada's health care system can, therefore, more correctly be described as a mixed public-private system in which the non-profitable parts are publicly-owned, while the profitable parts remain in private hands. Furthermore, as new ways are discovered to profit from previously unprofitable activities, those activities are increasingly being transferred into private hands, as well. This means that ever-larger portions of the federal and provincial health budgets are also finding their way into the pockets of the capitalists. This may explain why the business organizations are not complaining as much about the announcement of increased federal spending on health care as they were in the 1990s, when they were demanding that spending on health care be slashed.

The solution to the crisis afflicting Canada's health care system is not further privatization. That is actually the cause of the crisis. Rather, the solution is to build a health care system which is entirely publicly owned and controlled.

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over the political institutions, by legitimizing those institutions at a time when they are discredited in the eyes of the people.

Nevertheless, within the current situation in Canada, proportional representation has the potential to play a positive role, in that it may enable various smaller parties to participate more effectively in the political arena. However, if those parties merely view proportional representation as a means for them to share power with the larger capitalist parties, then it becomes a meaningless reform. Only if a party or coalition of parties emerges to champion the cause of eliminating political parties entirely from the electoral process can proportional representation play a positive role.

Does this mean that there is no further role for political parties in a modern democratic society? Not at all. Political parties are extremely important as a means to advance the interests of various collectives in society. They can also play an important role in educating people, organizing discussions of important political issues, and so on. It would only mean that they would no longer have a role in controlling the electoral process.

In summary, any revolutionary program for the democratic renewal of Canadian society must include, as a central demand, the direct empowerment of the Canadian people by eliminating control of the electoral process by political parties. If this central demand is implemented, than various other measures to empower the people and vest sovereignty in their hands would also become effective. However, if this central demand is not implemented, then every other reform becomes meaningless, or worse, a measure to strengthen the control and legitimacy of the capitalist ruling elite.

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