

Editorial

No 'free-market' health care

There's no doubt that Americans must have decent health care, but the plan which President Bill Clinton unveiled on Sept. 23 after a week of "bread and circuses" media hype, spells disaster for this country's health care system. While there are plenty of problems with today's health care system, most of the reform proposals which have been floated in recent years, including Clinton's, would pervert traditional care based on individual medical needs, and those defined by public health, into a system that would *institutionalize a fiscally derived and driven health care system*. And since the United States is now plunging into the deepest depression of this century, the plan would merely ensure that depression-driven "free-market forces" act with even more brutal efficiency to eliminate those who are deemed "unfit to survive."

Have no illusions about the significance of the huge proposed cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, which are supposed to help foot the bill for the plan. The "savings" will come through massive expansion of hospice death-camps as a substitute for intensive medical care, and through eliminating "futile treatment" to those whom we ought to have a moral commitment to try to save. Indeed, First Lady Hillary Clinton told radio talk show hosts that she has not told her husband yet, but she intends to include the so-called Living Will in the basic benefits package. These aspects, pioneered by the Nazi engenicists, far outweigh the proposed new Medicare prescription plan and long-term home care provisions, which were doubtless thrown in in order to secure the support of the American Association of Retired Persons.

Some basics of the Clinton plan:

Aim: Bring the rate of growth of health care costs down to that of the Gross Domestic Product by 1997, through "increasing competition, reducing administrative costs, and imposing budget discipline." So, if the economy is comatose, federal and state funds will be cut, much like what is happening in Canada and Britain.

The National Health Board, the President's seven hand-picked cronies, are to enforce whatever brutal

spending caps are necessary to bring health care costs into line with the GDP rate. This powerful board will enforce basic requirements for state plans, set the basic benefits package for the country, calculate premiums, and oversee state compliance with the budget. They can have all federal health appropriations withheld if states do not comply.

Employer-based coverage: All employers must provide coverage for employees, paying 80% of the premium cost of a basic package; the employee pays the rest. Employers' share is capped at 7.5% of payroll; companies with 50 or fewer workers will get subsidies if the average wage is below \$24,000 per year; the self-employed pay 100% of premiums. Companies of 5,000 or more employees can self-insure or join an alliance.

Universal access: Everyone is supposed to be guaranteed health care coverage with a basic package of benefits; everyone will pay something for that coverage. Everyone must enroll in a plan offered by the state-approved "health alliances" consisting of consumers and business (but not doctors), who negotiate prices with health care plans (made up of cartels of insurers, hospitals, doctors, nursing homes, etc). The alliances will rate and choose several managed care or HMO plans, and, if allowed, a fee-for-service plan for the area.

The basic benefits package costs the same for everyone, but an expanded package costs both individuals and employers more, and the employer is taxed if he provides it. No one can be turned down because of previous illness.

Some of that might sound nice to you, but it just won't work in a depression. There is simply no way that close to 39 million uninsured, 20 million underinsured, and 63 million temporarily uninsured are going to get decent treatment from a health system driven by the prevailing fiscal budget-cutting mania.

Our advice to our U.S. readers: Don't get emotionally caught up in the details of this media-orchestrated debate. Concentrate rather on getting everyone back to productive work, so that we can have an *expanding* tax base which can sustain a truly *human* health care system.