



Tale of a Waffle

At least 47 per cent of the voters in the last election pinned their hopes, with varying intensity, on Bill Clinton for his promise of health care reform. In sheer numerical terms, those who were unemployed, or faced imminent unemployment, those who worked two or three part time jobs, those who worked for greedy, inhuman small employers waited for this first democratic President in twelve years to make good on his single most important promise of American political life since the New Deal: to bring assurance of health care in the event of illness, chronic and sudden. The manner in which this promise has been unraveled in the last ten months or so is a tragic story for all human souls and particularly shameful for the "big" and "little" media.

There is a distinct Left and Right (or, to paraphrase Ronald Reagan whose syntax was always incorrect, left and wrong) division in the health care coverage in the media. The mainstream media, that includes the major networks

and the lead newspapers (we are focusing on the East coast papers, but the story isn't different elsewhere), have tried to address the issue of health care reform with prime time specials, news features and even special day-long segments with Mrs. Clinton (Good Morning America used her as a guest/host for a day last week). They have used every avenue to put forth the President's vision (sic) on health care. And that is the first problem. This President has an idea of health care as profound as an opportunist trying to get the coveted prize. Lacking spine and connected frame, he waffled and laid out his plan open for manipulation. That famous pen of his which

he waved in front of Congress as a threat of a veto for universal health care has lost its ink. When the lighthouse loses its compass, the ships simply toss with the waves.

The Right, on the other hand, has systematically launched an attack, in mainstream media and on marginal noisy outlets like Talk Radio and the Larry King-Donahue circuits, to discredit the very basic idea of health care reform. The favorite chorus on the Right is that there is no health care crisis, there is only health insurance crisis. Let a doctor tell a patient who needs some help to save his life, "We don't have problem treating you, but we have the problem of recovering money from you, if you live.



"The Robert (obnoxious) Dole bill now declares boldly, no promise of universal care, just some tightening of prices and delivery systems. How did we get here from the idea of taking care of every American, employed or otherwise, because each life is important (Republican or otherwise).

The most recent salvo in the chaotic debate was delivered by that great punching boy of the Right, Rush Limbaugh. In his infinite wisdom, which is endorsed by would-be Presidents like William Bennett and his millions of listeners, not to speak of closet supporters in the Republican Party, he made statements that are indicative of the reigning rationale in this country. Limbaugh says that Insurance Companies are justified in refusing care to people with pre-existing condition just as they reject insuring a burning house. In other words, if a human body shows signs even qualitatively equivalent of continual damage (theoretically, which body isn't suffering damage?), Insurance Companies must reject "wasting money" on such sinkingships. Take it for what its worth, but this is the value the Right wants to put on human life. You have a chance to measure yours while you breathe.

The other point of the Right, including the respectable members like Senator Dole, is that the First Lady and the President are "socializing" medicine. If you take a look at the paperback that the First couple has produced on health care, you would laugh at the suggestion that what they are doing is socializing. It is pure capitalistic belt tightening at its best and that does not assure care to uninsured in any more secure way than POWs get protection under the Geneva con-



vention. But even if we were to assume that medicine is being socialized, so what? If that ends up saving human lives and guarding human dignity, would you care? What else is socialized in this country. Social Security easily comes to mind. Is that such a problem? Aren't Republicans getting the benefit of that socialist measure? How about national defense? And, the payrolls of the members of Congress and the Executive? Think about the public school system. If that isn't socialized in the same sense that these wizards of ideology mean it, then what is?

It is all very sad and depressing. The Right has continued its savage attack on reason. The Left isn't anywhere to be seen and the Democrats haven't learnt a thing by just observing the Right over

the past fifteen years manipulate the public agenda with deceptive rhetorical tactics. The so-called liberals who seem to want to help a humanitarian position, have lost control of the debate. They don't seem to take control of the language of defense, if not of offense. Then you have the President who doesn't have the firmness needed of any medium level executive. He goes about shaping public opinion in a fashionable way, in televised town meetings. He has forgotten how to bring one's convictions to public life and fight battles for the people. Health care reform (or the Health Security Act) is not some ritualistic legislation. It will end up saving lives, alleviate human suffering and give capitalism its human face which it so desperately needs. — Shekhar Deshpande