

Tuesday, 4 January 2014

Queensland members unite to celebrate Medicare as public services face attack

Union members, Medicare staff and one of the architects of the universal health care scheme will mark its 30th anniversary and restate their support for it to remain in public hands.

ACTU President Ged Kearney and CPSU Queensland Secretary Bill Marklew will be at Medicare's Queensland headquarters today at noon to cut a cake marking three decades of publicly-funded healthcare.

As the Abbott Government ponders large scale cuts and privatisation of public services, the ACTU's Ms Kearney said it was more important than ever to defend it.

"Medicare is one of those things that makes our nation great - the quintessentially Aussie fair go, a strong social safety net that includes a health system that cares for all Australians. And yet that is exactly what is under threat from Tony Abbott's extreme agenda of privatisation, cuts to jobs and services, all of which is being done behind closed doors with the help of Corporate Australia."

The Government's National Commission of Audit, which is running the rule over every aspect of government activity, is expected to recommend wide scale cuts to services and the weakening of the social security safety net.

"We know that everything is on the table with the audit commission. We are on the knife edge of change in Australia and we cannot afford to allow the deep social changes underway to occur without real scrutiny," Ms Kearney added.

"Medicare has been giving Australians a world class health service for 30 years. We are here today to recognise its importance in the quality of life that we enjoy but also to say that we are ready to fight for its continued existence as a healthcare system funded by Australians for all Australians," Ms Kearney added.

CPSU's Mr Marklew said the Australian Public has always valued the way Medicare has been there for them and relies on that safety net as well the expertise that is supplied by the staff at Medicare.

A message from Bill Hayden AO, a former Governor General and Treasurer in the Whitlam Government that ushered in the scheme, will be read out to staff who attended the cake cutting ceremony in Brisbane. He paid tribute to staff, in particularly Judi and Marilyn who have worked at Medicare since its inception.

"For more than 30 years, this furiously debated domestic policy issue has made health care affordable for millions of Australians. What we worked to create - you have delivered. We could not have done this without Medicare's committed and professional employees," Mr Hayden said.

Media contact: Carla De Campo, 0410 579 575 and Eleni Hale, 0418 793 885

