

CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

CLRI (NSW)

ABN 52 476 362 010
Member of Catholic Church Religious Group

The Honourable Mark Latham
Leader, Australian Labor Party
Parliament House
Canberra

Thursday 24 June, 2004

Dear Mr Latham,

Re: New Charges for Prescription Medicines

I write on behalf of the CLRI Justice committee, a group representing the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW. CLRI includes approximately 4,000 Catholic Religious and their associates.

We wish to express our surprise and deep disappointment at the Federal Labor Party's decision to agree to the new bill imposing new charges for prescription medicines. Given your Party's underlying philosophy, your stated concern for those who have been disadvantaged in our society, particularly during the past three terms of Coalition leadership, and your previously strongly held view that the poor and sick would need to be protected from the proposed new charges, such an about-face appears incomprehensible.

We are aware of your concern to maintain the budget within reasonable limits, but it was our understanding that this would be done by introducing more equitable systems of finance and taxation, not by continuing the current Government's policies of creating greater inequities in Australian society. This acquiescence appears to us nothing more than an expedient strategy, which undermines Labor's supposed commitment to a universal health system. It will inevitably create further hardship for Australians who are poor. As has already been pointed out, this decision is a clear declaration that those who are poor and who suffer from illness and chronic health conditions no longer have a voice in the major parties.'

The strong disquiet of our members and of many of your own backbenchers leaves us wondering if there really is any longer a substantive difference in the policies of the major parties, or whether political expediency and the anticipated responses of the so-called aspirational voters are the sole determinants of policy for both Labor and the Coalition.

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We had hoped that your earlier calls for greater justice and equity for all Australians had its roots in the fundamental philosophy of the Labor. This decision certainly leaves us wondering about that perception.

We look forward to hearing from you about this fundamental issue for your Party.

Yours sincerely,

Jan Barnett rsj
(for CLRI NSW)

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