

Draft health document for SACP

The capitalist nature of SA's health care system is hidden under a racial mask. The capitalists tell us that if apartheid is removed then all our problems will be solved. Nothing could be further from the truth. The foundation stones of South Africa's health services has its roots in colonialism and capitalism. Unless these foundation stones are broken, health care in this country could remain the same for ever. Some of the capitalist foundation stones of our health system are essentially the following:

- **A disregard of social and environmental causes of illness.** This is not surprising since the social and environmental conditions created by capitalism (pollution, unemployment, poverty) are the biggest causes of ill-health.
- **An urban concentration of health services** (to ensure that the working class is merely 'patched up' to go back into production). Those who are not in production (the unemployed, old and the rural masses) are not properly catered for.
- **Health services serve the rich.** This country can boast the first heart transplant, but more than 20 years later, people are still dying of diseases of poverty. 4.5 children die of malnutrition every hour. 10 people die of TB every day, 11 children die of measles every day. 2000 workers die from accidents at work every year.
- **Curative care takes precedence over prevention.** There is no money to be made from prevention. The belated realisation that prevention is more sensible has not changed the strong emphasis on curative services.
- **The system is hospital-based and individualised.** The present system suffers from being hospital-based. Thousands of people are forced to flock to expensive academic and regional hospitals for illnesses that can be treated at a community health centre. Community-based health programmes are given little or no attention. The ethic of 'individualism' runs through this health service as well. Medical schools, nursing colleges and other institutions tend to produce health workers who are essentially individualistic, career-oriented, profit-motivated and elitist, with little understanding of the communities they are meant to serve.
- **The social relations in the health sector is another clear index of its capitalist nature.** Despite the fact that there are many different health workers involved in the delivery of health care; power is concentrated in the hands of professionals, mostly doctors. Nursing assistants, for example, are seen as mere appendages to the professional and is alienated and dehumanised. The health system is hierarchical, sexist and dominated by professionals.

- All traditional methods of care have been ignored and marginalised. This has meant that the traditional healers are completely outside the health service - driven 'underground' in a sense. The development of this sector was arrested by colonialism and continues to this day. The majority of African people, however, have resisted this cultural domination and still trust traditional methods more.

The prospect for a peaceful transition in this country is both promising and treacherous. It is promising because, the majority of people may have their first chance to have some say over their lives since colonial domination. It is treacherous because there are many forces who will resist fundamental change for the benefit of this majority. These forces will want to present the people with the above foundation stones in a new and glossy package. The forces who will resist fundamental change in the health sector are:

- most whites who benefited from apartheid,
- skilled health professionals who will want to preserve their privileges and power,
- drug-multinationals and owners of private hospitals,
- the health bureaucracy whose jobs will be at stake.

As the SACP, we will struggle to ensure that a new health service will serve the poor and disempowered majority. The foundation stones for a people's health service (with no glossy package) are as follows:

- Health care is a basic human right,
- The provision of health care is the responsibility of the state,
- Health care must be free (ie. no fee for service),
- Health care must be equally accessible to all.
- Health services must be based on the principles of primary health care,
- Health care must be comprehensive;
- Health services must be planned.
- Planning must go beyond our borders - there must be Southern African co-operation,
- Health services must be democratically and efficiently managed,
- There must be affirmative action to redress imbalances created by apartheid and capitalism,
- Health and social services should be delivered by an inter-disciplinary team effort.

If we want a health service that serves everyone (not just the rich), then change in this country would have to be substantial, not just constitutional. Some concrete proposals for substantial change are as follows:

- the development of an essential drug list and the development of a local drug industry,

- the development of a network of community health centres that will form the backbone of the health service,
- community-based health sciences education,
- compulsory community service for all health workers,
- a Bill of Patients' Rights,
- a Health Charter,
- the setting up of public commissions to look at the following:
 - health legislation
 - the regulation of the private sector
 - occupational health
 - health management
 - rehabilitation services

The most potent force for fundamental health change in our country is those who have an investment in health (not disease). This is the working class. Conditions should be created to make full popular control and management of health services possible. This will ensure that health becomes placed in the hands of the people, not just a few multi-nationals bureaucrats.