

AGE CARE REFORM HELD BACK BY BOTH MAJOR PARTIES

The latest desperate situation in Aged Care due to an urgent need for adequate staffing levels can be traced back to the John Howard Liberal government of 1997.

Since 1997 "The Age Care Act of that year defined anything that related to the affairs of an approved nursing home provider as "protected information". Anybody disclosing protected information about a nursing home could go to jail for two years, including revealing under staffing in a particular nursing home.

It has been said ever since John Howard was prime minister in the late nineties that the quality of aged care has spiralled down. This act of John Howard's clearly showed that the Liberal government at the time put the profits of nursing-home owners over the quality of the lives of the residents. Nothing has changed !

We need to remember that since John Howard's prime ministership there have been several Federal Labor governments as well as Liberal National Coalition governments that could have, and should have, repaired the problems but didn't.

Both major parties have displayed and continue to display a lack of care and respect towards the residents and workers in aged care. This is while caring for the pockets of the extremely rich and the corporate sector. Federal Labour leader, Anthony Albanese, can call for the sacking of the Aged Care Minister for the lack of Covid vaccinations for Aged Care, but he agreed with the Liberals to the huge tax cuts of \$16 billion to the wealthy which is about how much the Royal Commission into Aged Care and Safety estimated would be needed to fix Aged Care.

Now with the huge problem of finding aged care staff the Federal government is offering two cash payments just before an election, but no wage increase. A wage increase will impact the profit margin of the multinational corporations and the Federal government can't have that.

This present problem of trying to attract workers into aged care when the wages and conditions are not attractive is going to stay with us because of one of the recent free trade agreements agreed to by both the Liberal National coalition federal government and the Federal Labour opposition, namely the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Under this treaty, according to the Australian Fair Trade & Investment Network (AFTINET) the multinational aged care home owners can take the Federal government to an international arbitration court using Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses should the Federal government do anything that affects their profit, which legislated wage increases would. The Federal government can be fined \$100 of millions without the right to appeal. Labour again, by agreeing with the Federal Liberal National Coalition, this time on the free trade deal betrayed the unions and workers involved in aged care.

One can only wonder if the unions involved told their members that Labour helped stop them from getting wage increases, and hence helped restrict aged care from being a better place to work in and a better place for the aged residents.

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