

Vaccine patent breaking and the international fight for life

The pandemic is making explicit the workings of imperialism and the logic of international exploitation between central and peripheral countries

In one of the worst moments of the pandemic in Brazil, with more than 4000 deaths daily, the Butantan Institute suspended the production of Coronavac due to lack of available supplies. With a large part of the population aged 60 or older still not vaccinated, and a tiny minority of Brazilians who had access to the two doses, vaccination is suspended in several capitals due to lack of available vaccines. Meanwhile, in the United States, with the vaccine already available for the entire adult population, a debate begins about the possibility of vaccination for children between 12 and 15 years old, with a request from Pfizer to the North American national security agency. In the world, more than half of the vaccine stock has been bought by rich countries, some of which already have more vaccines than needed to immunize their entire population.

The pandemic is making explicit the functioning of imperialism and the logic of international exploitation between central and peripheral countries. The inequalities are frightening, with several underdeveloped countries forecasting the end of vaccination only in 2024, while the accelerated pace in the United States and Europe can guarantee a fully vaccinated population by the end of this year. It is naturalized a capitalist perspective that certain lives are worth, and a lot, more than others.

In this sense, an important debate has been organized internationally. At the World Trade Organization, India and

South Africa have proposed the suspension of patent rights on vaccines during the pandemic period. In other words, a break of patents that would guarantee the possibility of cheaper production by the underdeveloped countries themselves, without depending on the large private companies that have been producing and profiting from vaccination.

This measure was supported by the vast majority of underdeveloped countries, plus China and Russia, totaling 99 states. But it has been stopped by the United States, by a good part of the European nations, and, in contradiction with most of Latin America, by Brazil. Bolsonaro's government, therefore, at the same time that it leads the country with the highest number of daily deaths in the world, stands against a measure supported by most of the third world and that would have the Brazilian people themselves as one of the biggest beneficiaries.

The reason is simple, Bolsonaro is nodding to the United States and to the multibillionaire private health companies, and nationally he is already strengthening a proposition that there will be an alternative vaccination line in the country, created by the big health consortiums, which would vaccinate the richest. In a moment when the Brazilians are the people most affected by the pandemic, especially the poorest, both in number of deaths and in the lack of food on the table, and that the country has its population below the poverty line tripled, the Federal Government denies a move that could help accelerate the vaccination program. It goes against the grain of most governments of countries in similar situations and of international social health organizations such as Doctors Without Borders.

Instead, the country decided to subscribe to a so-called "third way" resolution at the WTO – a forum of vaccine-developing countries to examine better ways of distributing vaccines, a move that would most likely mean little to change the status quo of production, since these countries would

still mostly be rich countries and would have no obligation to follow any of the measures discussed at this forum.

The risk of keeping the situation as it is today is enormous. And not only for Brazil. The new strains being produced in the country have already been threatening other Latin American countries, such as Paraguay, and may expand and allow variants that are not solved by the current vaccines. In other words, at this moment all measures that allow a better distribution and production in underdeveloped countries need to be taken urgently. It is not the profit of a few billionaire companies that should prevent the mass production of vaccines. The fight to break patents and to build international campaigns to pressure in this direction will be a fundamental struggle in the next period in defense of life.

That is why it is necessary to have a broad international campaign in defense of the breaking of patents, which strengthens the proposal made by India and South Africa at the WTO, but which seeks to have this measure adopted by the different countries immediately. In Brazil, the bill of law for breaking patents is having its vote postponed by choice of the government. The role of social movements, left-wing parties, academic communities, among many other social actors should be to defeat this absurd position of Bolsonaro, to make Brazil approve the breaking of patents and defend it internationally. International solidarity, especially within the rich countries that were against this measure, will also be fundamental, and this international defense, with direct pressure on the different governments, will be necessary for this dispute. More than ever we need to defend that life be put before profit!