

Biden lifts the patents...

Coronavirus: Vaccines for the people, not for profits!

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“A first barrier has fallen with Biden’s decision to support the temporary lifting of intellectual property protections for coronavirus vaccines. In May, a new round of negotiations will begin at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Unanimity will be needed to lift the patents. And our mobilization to impose it. And quickly, and not country by country. But this is only the first step. We must force Big Pharma to share its technologies, not just its patents.”

Joe Biden has decided to support “the demand for the temporary lifting of intellectual property protections for coronavirus vaccines”. A demand formulated before the World Trade Organization since October 2020 by South Africa and India, joined by hundreds of governments of poor countries and civil society organizations. A surprise and a victory for activists from all over the world who demonstrated, with Free Vaccine and Bernie Sanders in Washington shouting “vaccines for the people, not for profits” to Pakistan with the People’s Rights Movement, against this absolute scandal. A pandemic that causes 3.3 million deaths. Vaccines that are more than 95% effective against severe forms of covid, financed with billions of public money, the USA for 15 billion, the EU for 2.5 billion... But the people, especially in poor countries, are deprived of vaccines because of patents, shortages and high prices. USA 45% of vaccinated, but India which produces vaccines for the whole world and faces a terrible second wave 9.7%. South Africa, which produces Jansen vaccines, only 0.6%! The advanced capitalist countries, with 15% of the world’s population, reserve 95% of RNA vaccines. Vaccine apartheid.

The USA imposed in the 90s the defense of intellectual property at the WTO, responsible for millions of deaths, including HIV. Biden received 3.3 million dollars from the pharmaceutical industry for his campaign. After 6 months of refusal and hundreds of thousands of additional deaths, we must not forget that they had to bow to the pressure of activists, the tribune of the prestigious journal Nature, the appeals of the Pope, of a hundred former presidents and Nobel Prize winners. But it is also a question of arbitration between the different sectors of capitalism. Protecting the patents of vaccine capitalism, its 25% profitability, and limiting vaccination to the richest countries? With the risk of a prolonged blockage of air travel, tourism, world trade and profits in a globalized economy. Not to mention the risk of a new variant that would make vaccines ineffective. A very real threat with a powerful second wave in India, the world’s vaccine factory, which is reducing its deliveries to cope with it, but also because of a lack of workers. Like China at the beginning of the covid crisis. Favouring Big Pharma’s rent or arbitrating in favour of the broader interests of capitalism. According to the International Chamber of Commerce, leaving developing countries without vaccines will cost rich countries \$4500 billion in lost revenue this year. Trump’s defeat decided the issue. Macron, who had three times opposed the request to suspend patents at the WTO, had to follow.

The pharmaceutical industry is up in arms against this proposal, in order to defend the income created by its patents. Thus Pfizer has 20 billion dollars in orders for 2021, Moderna 18.4 billion. To avoid creating a precedent that could be used for other pandemics, or to finally make anti-cancer or anti-hepatitis C treatments, whose prices are exploding, accessible to people around the world. One thinks of Gilead's Sovaldi, which costs barely 100 euros to manufacture per treatment. But it is invoiced at 24894 euros to the Social Security and therefore to our contributions, thanks to the 20-year patent exclusivity! Big Pharma also wants to avoid the transfer of RNA technology, which can be used for other very profitable vaccines, renewed every year, such as flu vaccines, or used tomorrow to open up new ultra-profitable therapeutic fields against cancers. More available vaccines means lower prices. Whereas with the shortage, Pfizer can on the contrary increase them, in the greatest secrecy.

But since these arguments were not very sexy, another one had to be invented. In the land of Big Pharma lies, "patents are not the problem. The problem is production capacity. Teva, Moderna and Sanofi say otherwise. Teva is the world's number one generic company. Kare Schulz, the CEO of the Israeli company, revealed that he had approached laboratories holding RNA vaccine patents to buy licenses and produce in his factories in the USA and Europe. The labs refused, saying they "had enough production capacity"! Big Pharma has no desire to share its RNA technologies with a future competitor. And to straighten out the accounts of the generic company in chief. Teva had to block huge provisions for future lawsuits in the US, for its alleged involvement in the opiate crisis and for price fixing on certain drugs, with price increases of 1000%. Welcome to the wonderful world of pharmaceutical capitalism!

Moderna was a small biotech company with no industrial production capacity. Its plant in Norwood, Massachusetts was barely able to supply the doses for its clinical trials. In April 2020, Moderna received \$483 million in U.S. taxpayer money to build a production facility. But on May 1, 2020, it chose to contract with the Swiss group Lonza. Which has never produced a single RNA vaccine! Lonza is redeveloping two existing plants, in Viège, Switzerland and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Thanks to massive technology transfers, the Portsmouth plant went into commercial production within two months. And the Viège plant, after a \$210 million investment, is now producing 6 million doses per week, and expects to produce 300 million doses by 2021. Sanofi produces dividends, 3.8 billion last year, but no vaccine. Faced with this scandal, it has decided to bottle other people's vaccines! But according to Sanofi's trade unionists, it has at least two factories with cold chambers that could easily produce RNA vaccines, and not just bottle them. So let's force them to transfer the technologies and impose the requisition of production capacities.

So a first barrier has fallen with Biden's decision. In May, a new round of negotiations will begin at the WTO. Unanimity will be needed to lift the patents. And our mobilization to impose it. And quickly, and not country by country. But this is only the first step. We must force Big Pharma to share its technologies, not just its patents. Big Pharma who refused to cooperate with the WHO Covid 19 technology access pool. The CEO of Pfizer even called it a nonsense! Suspension of patents, transfer of technologies, requisition under social control of the pharmaceutical industry, our mobilization continues "for an immediate, effective, universal and free access to these common goods that are the anti-covid vaccines" as demanded by the Patent Appeal on anti-covid vaccines Stop. Requisition! The genetic code of covid 19 is public, it is public subsidies that have financed the research. These are our vaccines, not their patents. Associated with a community health policy, which aims at building barrier actions and testing campaigns with and for the populations, especially the most vulnerable ones, common property vaccines are the only hope to save lives, to decrease the selection pressure of vaccine escape variants, to end shortages, high prices and vaccine apartheid, to regain power over our lives, and to roll back this pandemic

Frank Prouhet

