

The Struggle for Health

Sunday 1 April 2018, by [BODINI Chiara](#), [FRANCO Sebastian](#), [SENGUPTA Amit](#) (Date first published: 28 February 2018).

An emancipatory approach in the era of neoliberal globalization.

The objective of this collective work is to contribute to the debate on the role of health (and health struggles) in a general policy of emancipation with view to social change. Indeed, the brutal functioning of contemporary capitalism is a threat to the right to health in all its dimensions.

The brochure deals with global governance in health, the social determination of health, the privatization of health care systems and elements of reflection on the organization of struggles for health.

We hope that this brochure will be useful at local level as well as to bridge our different realities contributing to a necessary global movement for health.

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet has its origins in a meeting in autumn 2016, attended by over thirty activists, researchers and health professionals from Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe and North America. After intensive discussions and debates the meeting concluded unanimously that the struggle for health is a political struggle which challenges the fundamental practices of our society and the trends which shape them.

Neoliberalism, the dominant economic system in the world today, with its principal objective of endless accumulation of capital and the creation of profits for a tiny elite, stands in contradiction to the rights of populations to health and health care.

The vast majority of people in the world are subjected to very similar economic realities, forces and dynamics: the extraction of natural resources and the destruction of the environment; a forced homogenization of their way of life; commodification and privatization of all human and material spheres of life; forced competition between workers at a global scale; exclusion of billions of people from the 'benefits' of the system; and a rapid expansion of the power of transnational companies.

Under the yoke of neoliberal policies it has become increasingly difficult to exercise the right to make legitimate demands for social entitlements. Education is being privatized; the number of homeless people has increased; family incomes have crashed due to rising unemployment brought about by austerity measures; the environment is constantly being degraded as a consequence of unsustainable fossil fuel based industrial development; and social solidarity has been weakened through divisions created among people who are prompted to seek individual solutions to their problems.

Health systems are a product of struggles and the balance of power in society. Most health systems developed after the end of the Second World War and in the post-colonial period, in response to

social needs expressed by popular movements of the working people. The capitalist State, for its own requirement of a healthy workforce, has had a stake in developing health systems.

Health systems are therefore constructed through the interplay of social forces, shaped by historical changes in power relations in society, and hence in a state of constant evolution. Interdisciplinary, intersectoral and international alliances for health, in all its dimensions, are already being built in different parts of the world. Various struggles are progressing towards the construction of communal and collective identities and these raise the real possibility of the emergence of a political force capable of transforming society.

The vast diversity of actors in this struggle – workers, farmers, indigenous people, health workers and professionals, patients, students and teachers, political and social activists, trade-unionists – all contribute to the development of an unified struggle which connects our countries and regions, and links our continents. In everyday life, these struggles conceive, elaborate and find concrete and immediate solutions to the needs of the people and their right (collective and individual) to life and health.

The consequences of climate change and its social, economic and political consequences will have an enormous impact on the general health of people (related to access to water, food, environmental pollution, massive population displacement and their impact on social systems, etc.). New technologies have the potential to improve people's conditions of living and health. However, currently these technologies are controlled by global capitalism and their inappropriate utilization could have adverse effects on employment, and have a negative impact on healthcare related practices.

Technologies that can store and search for huge amounts of personal data also threaten to become a major source of invasion of individual privacy. This global situation represents an unprecedented challenge for humanity and without doubt the struggles for health will play an essential part in the popular mobilization required to address it.

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