

Socialist countries beat back COVID-19

written by Scott Scheffer
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Workers at the Chinese vaccine maker Sinovac Biotech.

Nov. 22 — Another wave of COVID-19 is raging across the U.S. The death count has now reached a quarter-million; Black, Brown and Indigenous communities have suffered the heaviest toll.

After actively discouraging all recommended methods of slowing the spread of the disease and cutting lockdowns short to try to get capitalist production restarted, the Trump regime has focused for months exclusively on the development of a vaccine.

In March, in an article about the efforts to develop a vaccine, the New York Times said that “the United States, China and Europe are battling to be the first.” That competition does exist in the major capitalist countries. It is an all-out, cutthroat battle — each country prioritizing their economy, trying to reopen businesses that are shut down. Secrecy abounds and the competition is even between companies in the same country. But the New York Times was being deceitful to include China in the battle “to be the first.”

China, Cuba and communists and socialists the world over have led amazingly successful campaigns against the virus and have a different perspective and a different goal than the capitalist countries. They don’t view gaining control of the virus in their own countries as the end of the fight — their goal is to help the rest of the world as well.

China’s death toll under 5,000

China’s Communist Party prioritized saving lives over keeping their economy going and shut down huge areas where around 100 million people live as soon as COVID-19 was identified. Their economic sacrifices paid off. With no evictions, no job losses, and food distributed as people isolated and quarantined, China limited its death toll to less than many single states and cities in the U.S. — under 5,000.

While still vigilant to prevent a new wave of the virus with social distancing, contact tracing and other measures, China is now working furiously to share medical equipment and supplies, and developing vaccines to help break the back of the pandemic in the poorest countries in the world. They have joined Covax, an international alliance committed to providing two billion doses of vaccine to poor countries. The U.S. declined to participate and given the current status of their vaccine development efforts, China is likely to be the largest contributor to the effort.

Following up on the propaganda attacks emanating from the U.S. earlier this year, China's commitment to try to help the rest of the world has been attacked in the capitalist press as "schemes" to achieve their "foreign policy goals."

But the attacks on China's efforts may not be limited to slander. There is even well-founded suspicion around the cancellation of a trial in Brazil of a Chinese pharmaceutical company's vaccine. President Jair Bolsonaro — a reactionary and a close ally of Trump — pressured their pharmaceutical regulators to cancel Sinovac's trial after a suicide by a participant. Bolsonaro later gloated to the press that it was "a victory for me." There has been a huge outcry from medical professionals, virologists and epidemiologists in Brazil because the suicide had nothing to do with the safety of the vaccine.

As four of China's vaccine candidates have progressed through Phase 3 trials they have inoculated up to one million people at home, including students, front-line workers, workers who travel frequently as part of the Belt and Road Initiative and the People's Liberation Army — on an emergency basis. As of yet, there are no reports of serious or unexpected side effects.

U.S. sanctions block progress

China's achievements in fighting the pandemic have been unparalleled. And even

though terrible U.S. sanctions have damaged the economies of some progressive and socialist countries and hindered progress, all evidence shows that socialist and communists in government, from Vietnam to Cuba, from India to China, are still better equipped than even the most developed capitalist countries to deal with this world crisis. If the deadly U.S. sanctions regime were defeated, the world's population would be far better off in dealing with this pandemic.

In India, Communist Party Marxist member K.K. Shailaja astounded observers around the world as she swung into action to limit an outbreak in her densely populated home state of Kerala, where she serves as minister of health. The entire state government of Kerala is in the hands of her party. Shailaja was honored by the United Nations because her sensitivity to local traditions won the trust of the population and allowed a vigorous campaign that kept the number of cases as well as the case fatality rate much lower than in the rest of India in January and February.

Now, due to many people returning to Kerala from abroad and because of many traditional festivals taking place, a second wave has hit. Still, under the leadership of Shailaja Teacher, as she is known, the case fatality rate has been kept down to an incredibly low 0.37 percent.

Cuba, a world leader against COVID-19

Cuba has also been a world leader in the fight against COVID-19. With a great deal of experience in biologic medicine accumulated during past outbreaks of dengue fever and a host of tropical diseases, their expertise not only helped them keep their own death toll to just 131, but has enabled them to save lives throughout the world.

Interferon-a2b, a biologic drug, was developed by Cuban scientists in 1986. One clinical study showed that when administered early during the infection, it cuts the case fatality rate from 2.95 percent to 0.92 percent. When they laud the success

against COVID-19 in South Korea, the mainstream Western press omits that Cuba's biologic drug was instrumental in keeping South Korea's case fatality rate to about 1.65 percent.

Now Interferon-a2b is being manufactured in China to keep up with demand from all over the world. Ever worsening U.S. sanctions make it impossible for Cuba to manufacture enough to meet the international need. The sanctions are also blocking the progress of Cuba's own four vaccines currently in Phase 2 trials — early testing on small groups of humans.

A Mint Press News article notes the effect of sanctions on Cuba's vaccine production and the potential help to other countries that they might be able to provide otherwise:

“Should any of these efforts ultimately succeed, the Caribbean nation — already a medical powerhouse that has developed a lung cancer vaccine and methods to stop mother-to-baby HIV and syphilis transmission — will likely become an important supplier to other Latin American and developing countries that have been effectively shut out from purchasing COVID vaccines from Western companies, as rich nations have already begun hoarding coronavirus medicines.” ([“Cuba Could be on the Brink of a Revolutionary COVID Vaccine, But US Sanctions Are Slowing It Down”](#) MPN, Nov. 16

There is a healthy mistrust of capitalist corporations — including giant pharmaceuticals run by billionaires. If they do come up with a safe and effective vaccine or more than one, it will be due to the research and work of the tens of thousands of scientists employed by them and should be recognized as an important achievement of science. But this pandemic has shown that the drive for profit above all else that is inherent to capitalism is obsolete, and worldwide cooperation — a socialist world — is long overdue.

