

China expands international medical solidarity to fight COVID

written by Scott Scheffer
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A delivery of Chinese COVID vaccines arrives in Cambodia.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has overseen a failed effort to combat COVID-19, and in fact, appears to have thrown up its hands in surrender. As of this writing, 843,000 people in the U.S. have died, and the omicron variant is now overloading hospitals with COVID patients, including thousands of children.

The symptoms may or may not be less severe – assessments in the media are contradictory. But in Chicago, Boston and New York City, where the earliest surges of omicron took place, patients are dying on only a slightly smaller scale than during previous waves of infections – because of the sheer number of cases.

In spite of all this, capitalist government institutions are pulling back control efforts. Millions of parents are worrying that the premature return to in-school studying will send their children to the hospital.

Two weeks ago, just days after a Dec. 21 letter from the CEO of Delta Airlines requesting that the isolation period be lessened, the CDC did exactly that. The isolation guidelines were lowered from 10 days to five days.

Had there been a higher level of global cooperation early in the pandemic, it's questionable whether omicron would have even come into existence.

U.S. capitalists block cooperation

The means to vaccinate the world through a cooperative international plan existed, and as the U.S. spewed hateful propaganda and anti-communist conspiracy theories, the Chinese government repeatedly called for a cooperative effort. But the chance to move forward was squandered by capitalist greed and vaccine nationalism promoted by U.S. big money.

Giant corporations that own health insurance companies, hospital chains and drug manufacturers, as well as the banks that invest in them, are so dominant in the U.S. economy that the availability of health care has historically compared miserably

even to other major capitalist countries.

That U.S. capitalism produced one of the most resourceful scientific and medical communities in history didn't help, because it also has commodified all of science to an extent never seen before. Life-saving medical care and even preventive medicine is a privilege that communities of color and poor people in general are often denied.

Further, instead of going all-out to produce and distribute vaccines globally, the U.S. ruling class' nationalist and genocidal hoarding of life-saving science is what gave SARS-CoV-2 all the time it needed to mutate and for the omicron variant to emerge in Africa, where the vaccination rate is in the single digits.

Even the design of the mRNA vaccines – whose development and production was funded by the U.S. government – points to the nationalist orientation of giant capitalists. Regardless of how effective they are, the required cold storage and transportation makes them impractical for a global vaccination campaign.

That didn't have to be the case. For instance, once the science, research, development and manufacture of the vaccines was accomplished, redirecting the resources normally devoted to the U.S. imperialist war machine might have made short work of COVID-19.

Many other countries with far fewer advantages than the United States have done a much better job protecting lives and controlling the spread of the disease.

Socialist countries' achievements

Cuba and China have stood out as models of how a pandemic should be dealt with.

Every revolution of the 20th century that set out to build socialism, at its onset, exhibited an all-out effort to improve health care. This history of prioritizing health instead of profit is the foundation of the remarkable achievements by both countries

during the COVID-19 pandemic.

China and Cuba used every resource possible to produce vaccines and treatments to protect their own populations. At the same time – because a pandemic cannot be ended by vaccinating within the borders of one country – they both have shared medical teams, vaccines, treatments and supplies internationally, even while combating the disease at home.

When the 1949 Chinese Revolution ended what they called the “century of humiliation,” the early days in the process of rebuilding saw an unprecedented determination to eradicate diseases that were associated with deep poverty.

Beginning in 1949 and growing during the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong’s army of “barefoot doctors” received basic medical training and set out for the countryside to promote preventive care and treat common illnesses.

Over the decades, China has beaten back or eliminated numerous communicable diseases that had run rampant throughout the country, such as plague, smallpox, cholera and typhus. In addition, cases of malaria and schistosomiasis have been reduced dramatically.

Schistosomiasis – a parasitic disease from freshwater snails – infected 10 million Chinese people in the mid-1950s. Mao was so elated as the eradication campaign began showing signs of success that he wrote poetry about it and spoke about it frequently.

China’s Health Silk Road

While it is true that the Communist Party of China has prevailed on many capitalist corporations operating there to contribute to health care and the general welfare of the population, the Chinese health care system itself is almost wholly state-owned, and the “Health Silk Road,” as China’s international medical solidarity has come to

be called, is a longtime CPC initiative.

Notably, and to great praise by international health agencies, China has been working hard to replicate this success against diseases of poverty as part of the Health Silk Road, particularly against schistosomiasis in Africa, where 90% of cases exist today.

This drive to help spread health care internationally has ramped up during the pandemic. When COVID began killing people in droves during March 2020, Chinese medical teams went to hard-hit Iran and Italy. By June 2021, the



foreign ministry announced that China had delivered more than 350 million vaccine doses to more than 80 countries.

Last August, President Xi Jinping pledged a \$100-million donation to Covax, an international agency coordinating global vaccine distribution, but added a pledge of 2 billion vaccine doses to be provided internationally outside of Covax.

By October 2021 the China International Development Cooperation Agency reported that [over 1.5 billion doses](#) have already been delivered to 106 countries, focusing on Africa, Asia, Latin America and the South Pacific.

While there is still much to be done to safeguard the Global South from this deadly disease and possible new variants, China continues its own medical internationalism and its call for global cooperation instead of Cold War slander and capitalist greed.

