

Suspending COVID vaccine patent restrictions puts people before profits



By John Bachtell

A move is underway internationally to temporarily scrap patent restrictions on COVID-19 vaccines that are making pharmaceutical companies' profits explode while many countries struggle to inoculate their people against the deadly virus. In a surprise decision, the Biden administration announced its support Wednesday for a waiver of such patent rights.

But to happen, all 164-member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) will have to agree. Under current intellectual property protections, manufacture of the vaccines developed by private companies is blocked to anyone but the patent holders. If agreement on a waiver is reached, local production facilities could then ramp up vaccine production exponentially to meet the global health emergency.

With the announcement, the Biden administration joins much of the world in viewing vaccines as "global public goods" rather than commodities. But it's also a recognition that protection of corporate patent rights was a major obstacle to global vaccination. And without global vaccination, no country is safe from the pandemic and its variants.

Along with the United States, the European Union has been a major obstacle in the WTO to waiving patent rights. Given that the U.S. typically sides with corporations on such matters, Biden's decision was

all the more stunning for the rest of the world.

The call for waiving patent rights, known as TRIPS, was initiated by India and South Africa and is currently supported in the WTO by 90 countries, mainly from the global South. Other vaccine-producing countries, like Russia, have also signed on to the move. Urgent calls for waiving patent rights come in the face of massive global inequality in the production and distribution of vaccines. The advanced capitalist countries have "cleared the

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shelves" of vaccines while the pandemic ravages many countries in the global South, beginning with India.

Pharmaceutical companies plan to produce between 10-15 billion vaccine doses in 2021. Wealthier capitalist countries have already bought

In a surprise decision that angered Big Pharma, the Biden administration announced its support for a waiver of COVID-19 vaccine patent rights.

up two-thirds of vaccine orders. The COVAX facility, associated with the World Health Organization, oversees vaccine distribution to 92 impoverished countries and estimates only a 20% vaccination rate of people in those countries by the end of the year.

Biden advocated waiving the patent rights during the 2020 election campaign but was under intense pressure from Big Pharma. The announcement angered industry CEOs, who, along with billionaire Bill Gates, opposed the waiver. Big Pharma stocks took a hit on Wall Street with the news.

In private meetings with White House officials, industry lobbyists reportedly tried to pitch patent protections for their profits as a national security issue, warning that China or Russia might “exploit” technologies like the mRNA method behind the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines to develop vaccines or therapeutics for other conditions like cancer or heart problems. How helping save lives supposedly amounted to a threat to U.S. national security interests was left unsaid.

The U.S. government spent \$20 billion to subsidize corporate development of vaccines and their advanced purchase. This year, Pfizer expects to make an additional \$15 billion in profits while Johnson & Johnson projects to rake in \$10 billion in profits.

Sen. Bernie Sanders also praised Biden’s decision. “This is exactly the kind of leadership the world needs right now,” he said. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, in a social media post, said simply, “Let’s do insulin next.”

Over 60 House Democrats had been urging Biden to support the waiver. “We, the most powerful nation in the world that can help bring an end to this catastrophe, cannot sit idly by—constrained by Big Pharma—watching millions of people die,” said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., who was leading the effort.

“I believe we have a moral obligation...to make sure that the rest of the world does not suffer and die, as it were, from something we can help them with and help them prevent,” said Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Massacre of protesters and economic crisis push Colombia workers to strike

By Morning Star & PW

Colombia is in the midst of another general strike, with unions saying the government has failed to listen to demands for emergency measures to deal with rising poverty and hunger. Monday night’s massacre of protesters by police in the city of Cali have further enraged the democratic and people’s movements in the country and garnered the government international condemnation.

The action was called by the Central Union of Workers (CUT). The trade union federation also demanded that the streets be demilitarized. Even before the bloodshed in Cali, 19 people had already been killed and more than 1,000 injured in anti-government protests over the previous week.

The number of dead in Cali from Monday night’s massacre is not yet known, but police there opened fire on protesters participating in a march against the central government’s efforts to dump the costs of the economic crisis and the pandemic onto the country’s working class.

CUT president Francisco Maltes called on all Colombians to “maintain and increase the mobilizations” despite right-wing President Ivan Duque’s agreement to withdraw a tax reform package that

would disproportionately hit the poorest people.

Though Duque’s government claimed it would also raise wealth taxes on millionaires, the bulk of money raised from its planned “reforms” would have come from the pockets of working families. A nearly 20% hike in utility bills was one part of Duque’s plan; a similar increase in gasoline taxes would also have been imposed. New income taxes would also have been levied on people in lower income brackets, those making \$700 per month.

The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights was more forceful than the White House, opting not to criticize demonstrators at all and instead condemning police actions as the source of violence. The U.N. office said it was “deeply alarmed” that demonstrators were shot down in the streets and stressed its “solidarity with those who have lost their lives, as well as the injured and their families.”

It warned the Colombian military and police to follow the law and reminded the government of its “responsibility to protect human rights” and protect the right to peaceful assembly and protest.

Police opened fire on demonstrators Monday night, killing an unknown number of people.

Lawyers for killer cop Chauvin trying to overturn his guilty verdict



By John Wojcik

Starting with social media posts and Fox News, racists have been going after a juror in the Derek Chauvin trial because that juror participated in the last annual march in Washington that was held to commemorate the historic March on Washington led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Although it does not look like, at this point anyway, that Chauvin's guilty verdict for his killing of George Floyd would be overturned by Judge Peter Cahill, if it happened it would not be the first time a murder conviction was thrown out after new facts about a juror were ascertained.

A photo of juror Brandon Mitchell at the last August march in remembrance of King's 1963 "I Have a Dream Speech" began circulating online soon after the trial concluded. The photo shows Mitchell wearing a t-shirt with a picture of King and the words, "get your knee off our necks" and "BLM," for Black Lives Matter.

Mitchell described his participation in the march as simply his voicing support for the message of King and the civil rights movement and that his participation at that time had nothing to do with the trial of Chauvin, which was still many months away.

The rally he attended was not specifically a rally for Floyd but rather an anniversary march to celebrate the 1963 march.

The attempt by Chauvin's lawyers to overturn the guilty verdicts on the basis of Brandon's attendance at the march is not seen, by itself at least, as enough reason for Cahill to throw out the verdicts. Chauvin's lawyers are believed, however, to be attempting to combine this with other issues in hopes of overturning the jury's decision.

Nevertheless, there is precedent for verdicts being overturned when jurors withhold information during the period in which they are being questioned by lawyers for the defense and the prosecution.

As for the Chauvin case, defense attorney Eric Nelson is questioning the guilty verdict on grounds that "the jury committed misconduct and/or felt race-based pressure, among other issues." Beyond that, Nelson's request did not include details.

He is expected to file more details in his ongoing attempt to overturn the historic verdict against a policeman who committed murder. The judge could hold a hearing, and it is within his power to rule on the issue of whether the juror's participation in the march mattered.

However, lawyers for the killer cop are not expected—regardless of how or whether Judge Cahill rules—to give up their quest to set Chauvin free. Look for the lawyer Nelson to use an unfavorable ruling by Cahill, if he does decide to rule, as another reason to file for an appeal of the guilty verdicts.

They attack both the jury and the judge.

LOCAL NEWS

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In Chile elections

By Emile Schepers

The right-wing government of President Sebastian Piñera is super unpopular, so the left has an opening in the November 21 general elections.

Daniel Jadue, the communist mayor of Recoleta, a suburb of Santiago, Chile's capital, is showing an advance in very early polls for the presidential election. He got 17.9% in an early March poll, more than any other candidate.

There are several other leftists running, as well as a large number of right-wing and centrist candidates.

Los Tigres del Norte llaman a sus fans a vacunarse

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

Los Tigres del Norte se arregaron las camisas para vacunarse contra el coronavirus, y ahora invitan a sus seguidores a seguir el ejemplo.

“Entusiasmadamente decidimos recibir las vacunas COVID-19 para la salud y el bienestar de nosotros mismos, nuestras familias, y esperamos que todos nuestros fans se unan a nosotros”, dijo la banda en un comunicado emitido el jueves por la noche.

“Cuanto más rápido nos vacunen a todos, más pronto nuestros seres queridos estarán mejor protegidos, y podremos empezar a reunirnos de nuevo para celebrar en grande nuestra música, nuestra cultura y mucho más”, agregó

La emblemática banda de música norteña también documentó su vacunación en un anuncio de servicio público lanzado en días recientes en el que hablaron en una combinación de inglés y español, con subtítulos disponibles en ambos idiomas.

“Verdaderamente casi no se siente, casi no sentí nada. Me sentí contento”, dice el vocalista y acordeonista Jorge Hernández en el video tras recibir la vacuna. “Tenemos que estar seguros de que estamos bien, de que tenemos la oportunidad de estar seguros”.

“Lo que le puedo decir a los campesinos, a los paisanos, es que es muy importante recibir la inyección y no tener miedo, porque cuanto más saludable estés, más saludable te vas a sentir”, expresa por su parte el bajista y vocalista Hernán Hernández.

El anuncio, producido por Los Tigres con el programa Listos California de la Oficina de Servicios de Emergencia del Gobernador de California (Cal OES) junto a la Liga de Ciudadanos Latino Americanos Unidos (LULAC) y la Fundación Nacional Hispana para las Artes, es parte de la serie web InformaGente y puede verse en YouTube y el ciber sitio de Listos California.

“Esta crisis de COVID nos ha quitado demasiado pronto a muchos de nuestros seres queridos y nos ha mantenido aislados del resto de nuestras familias ya por mucho tiempo”, dijeron Los Tigres del Norte en su misiva del jueves. “Afortunadamente, hay un camino muy claro para que avancemos hacia un mejor mañana, juntos de nuevo, vacunándonos”.

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