

Imperialism and Covid

Covid, the once in a century pandemic has started an unprecedented pharmaceutical race over the globe. Corporates around the world vied with each other to bring the vaccine first to capture the world market. Never was the market so large and so global for globalisation not only brought the markets together but also spread viruses, diseases and hunger to every corner of the world. For Capitalist destruction not only reached the Amazon it even took Covid to its interior tribes. While by its very nature, governments in capitalist countries, though having every resource to develop vaccines, restricted themselves to funding Multinational Corporation, placing pre orders and procuring. Further, Capitalism wants to use this crisis to gain its losing ground and continue the subjugation of the countries and peoples.

Imperialist Countries Hoarding Vaccines:

The US initially refused to accept the severity of Corona virus pandemic and led to lakhs of deaths in the suburbs where Black and Latin American communities lived. As is everywhere, the burden of Capitalism falls on the poor, even in Capitalist countries. India and Brazil followed US in its laxity. But after a strong back lash from the public, The Trump administration funnelled \$10 billion into the Operation Warp Speed program, including \$1.95 billion to Pfizer for 100 million vaccine doses. The pay-out was guaranteed, even if the vaccine failed to receive emergency authorisation. Similar purchasing arrangements were made with Moderna, which also received \$1.5 billion for research. Four other pharmaceutical companies joined Operation Warp Speed and scooped up heaps of taxpayer dollars.

Over all, the US has acquired enough vaccines for three times its population. Hoarding, for the sake of ensuring that Americans are vaccinated first and foremost – even if that means scores of vaccines go unused. After some criticism, Biden agreed to distribute some superfluous vaccines to Mexico and Canada. This is not an act of generosity but to prevent unvaccinated nations at its borders. In true American fashion, these vaccines are essentially loans.

The EU has ordered 1600 million doses for its adult population of roughly 375 million... the UK has ordered 219m full vaccinations for its 54 million adults (a surplus of 165m), while Canada, even Its own vaccine production was

hamstrung by the privatization of a government-owned vaccine lab, has ordered 188m full vaccinations for its 32 million adults (an excess of 156 million).

Pfizer's German partner - BioNTech was given \$445 million by the government of Germany.

Scarcity Created by Capitalist:

Vaccine candidates received significant public funding from governments, but none of this money had conditions attached that would guarantee access, including requiring companies to transfer all technology to other vaccine manufacturers, be transparent about their costs, or sell their vaccines at-cost.

We have the most advanced technology with global distribution networks with the capability to manufacture enough vaccines and immunize all people within a month. But this won't happen in a Capitalist society where profits are foremost, and a crisis of this magnitude provides super profits. So, they have the mechanism of **patents**, bilateral agreements, and World Trade organisations that ensure the unavailability or availability at the risk of sovereignty.

Oxford University [covishield] initially promised to create an open-source vaccine that could be reproduced by anyone with the capacity to do so.

Unfortunately, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which practices its own form of colonialism by manipulating the healthcare systems of entire nations, intervened and pushed Oxford to partner with a pharmaceutical company. The university then signed an exclusive deal with the British-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, giving it sole rights. Initially AstraZeneca, pledged to sell their vaccine at a 'no profit' price during the pandemic, while both Pfizer and Moderna have said they will not sell their COVID-19 vaccines at cost. Later even AstraZeneca too back tracked.

Pharmaceutical companies have become gatekeepers to products that are, in reality, a sum of collective resources and knowledge. COVID-19 vaccines, for example, are built on existing technologies and data from public-sector workers and institutions, and developed with billions in public funding; governments and charitable trusts funded 97% of the AstraZeneca vaccine research while developers retained full ownership. In India too, from virus culturing, isolating, to drug testing, to genome sequencing the load of the main research activity and the costs are borne by many public institutions like CCMB, ICMR, NIV etc for the private manufactures like SII and

Bharat Biotech while profits are appropriated by them. Even the 3rd and 4th phase trials which could have costed billions for the manufacturers were done directly on the public in the name of emergency. When once a vaccine is developed with the collective public resources all the rights are appropriated by the developer.

In the current **highest bidder system**, it could be years before those in low-income countries receive doses, because wealthy countries have monopolised the available supply.

Contradiction between the Capitalists:

USA initially declared that it will buy all vaccines from any company in any country that brings the vaccine, that is the vaccine company has to give priority to USA at the cost of its own country people. Of course, this did not materialise.

EU has ordered 300 million doses in November. However, when serious delays in the vaccination program became evident, the crevices in the EU became apparent. Its regional solidarity plan came to an end. Despite being the country where the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was developed, Germany and countries such as France, Denmark, and Hungary, which faced challenges in getting sufficient jabs, started initiatives to purchase vaccines by **deactivating the EU**. The process, which continued with the escalation of tensions among EU partners and the use of harsh political rhetoric such as “transition from **vaccine diplomacy to vaccine thuggery**,” was triggered after delivery cutbacks by Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca in following supply issues at their Belgian facilities.

Although AstraZeneca, the UK’s biggest vaccine supplier, stated that the British government, which made the purchase agreement three months earlier, is a delivery priority, EU leaders wanted the company to eliminate the interruptions by directing the production at its facilities in the UK to Europe. The British government, acting with the self-confidence of the post-Brexit era, did not allow such a change, stating that its citizens have priority in access to vaccines. The European Commission, which finally put a threat of export restrictions on the table for all vaccines produced in Europe, tried to persuade the British government to give up on parts of the AstraZeneca quota in exchange for receiving Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines produced in Belgium.

Imperialism’s Vaccine Hegemony:

American and European pharmaceutical companies require strict nondisclosure agreements for all vaccine purchases. Low-income countries

are thus forced to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies that in turn demand confidentiality regarding contract details. Little specific or reliable information is available about what some countries are paying, forcing others to negotiate in the dark. This is extortion.

The US-based company Pfizer is holding governments to ransom, interfering with their legislation, and even demanding sovereign assets, such as federal bank reserves, embassy buildings and military bases, as a guarantee against the cost of any future legal cases.

Talks between Argentina and Pfizer began in June 2020. Then, Pfizer asked to be compensated for the cost of any future civil lawsuits. If someone files a civil lawsuit against Pfizer in Argentina and wins that case, the government of Argentina and not Pfizer would pay the compensation. So, Argentina's parliament passed a new law in October 2020, but Pfizer was unhappy with its phrasing. The law said Pfizer needs to at least pay for negligence, for its own mistakes.

Pfizer rejected this, after which Argentina offered to amend the law to define negligence more clearly - to include only vaccine distribution and delivery under negligence.

Pfizer was still not happy and demanded the law be amended through a new decree, which Argentina refused. Pfizer then asked Argentina to buy an international insurance to pay for potential future cases against Pfizer, to which the country agreed.

In December 2020, Pfizer came back with more demands, and demanded **sovereign assets as collateral**. Pfizer wanted Argentina to put its bank reserves, military bases and embassy buildings at stake.

Pfizer's put the following demand on Brazil-

Brazil waives the sovereignty of its assets abroad in favour of Pfizer, that the rules of the land - be not applied on Pfizer, that Brazil take into consideration a delay in delivery, that Pfizer is not penalised for a delayed delivery, and that in case of any side effects, Pfizer be exempted from all civil liability. The Pfizer's deals with both Argentina and Brazil failed.

Another unnamed country, unnamed due to its non-disclosure agreements, succumbed to Pfizer's pressure and agreed to its exploitative deal. This caused a three-month delay -potentially equating to thousands of additional deaths.

Governments compensating for lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies is normal. In the United States for example, the PREP Act (Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness act) gives total immunity to

companies like Pfizer and Moderna. But only if something goes wrong unintentionally, and this does not apply to negligence.

Pfizer has signed vaccine supply agreements with nine Latin American and Caribbean countries to date: Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. The terms of those deals are unknown because of the compulsory 'non-disclosure agreements'.

Pfizer is looking at making 15 billion dollars [1 lakh crore rupees] from vaccine sales this year, and is in talks with 100 countries and organisations

The **US Department of Health and Human Services**, a department that appears to care for people, admitted that it used "**diplomatic relations**" in order to force Brazil, one of the worst-hit countries in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, to **reject the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V**.

AstraZeneca, which holds rights to the Oxford vaccine, which initially promised vaccine sale at cost, is charging African countries much higher sums per dose than their richer counterparts. It was revealed that Uganda was paying \$7 (£5.07) and South Africa \$5.25 (£3.80) per dose, when the EU paid just \$2.16 (£1.56) per dose.

Tactics to Prevent Revolts -COVAX:

Long before the onset of this pandemic, Imperialist foundations like Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation started pumping billions for research on Covid like SARS viruses to prepare for any pandemic, to study how to profit from it and to come up with plans for thwarting public anger. In 2018, they even conducted a mock drill on preparedness for a covid like pandemic.

Before the pandemic, five multinational pharmaceutical companies were responsible for 80% of global vaccine sales. Countries like India which have manufacturing capabilities can use "TRIPS' flexibilities," and invoke 'compulsory licencing' to bypass patents in the public interest (though with the payment of royalties).

But the retaliation threats of Imperialist countries thwarted them to do so. For e.g., USA puts any country that dares to do so in a list in the 'Special 301 Report'. USA uses this list to apply economic sanctions. In the 20 years after TRIPS India has invoked the 'Compulsory Licencing' clause only once, in 2012 for Cancer drug. From there upon it never dared to do so even in this severe pandemic when daily deaths stood at more than 4000. India is not the only country, pharmaceutical giant Gilead threatening to sue the Ukrainian government.; Abbot withheld new medicines from Thailand for its attempts to produce two patented HIV drugs using compulsory licencing.

While WTO provided some flexibilities, Imperialist countries are bypassing them through aggressive provisions in their bilateral and regional trade agreements.

To prevent countries from invoking the 'compulsory licensing' or open sourcing patents, in the face of a global pandemic making evident their moral bankruptcy, the Imperialist came up with a new scheme.

Last year, in a closed process led by McKinsey & Company, a small group of organisations, including the World Bank, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the WHO, shaped what is now one of the only pathways for many low-income countries to access COVID-19 vaccines, The COVID-19 Global Access initiative (COVAX). Instead of demanding Capitalist countries and their corporates to provide vaccines atleast at no profit prices, COVAX pools resources to pre-order 2bn vaccines and aims to distribute them at the same rate to its over 180 participating countries. This ensures super profits for Corporates while watering anger from low-income countries.

Many actors involved in COVAX are concurrently protecting, expanding, and profiting from pharmaceutical patents. The EU, the UK and Australia, which are currently blocking a sweeping proposal in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to waive COVID-19-related patents, are also prominent donors and supporters of COVAX, even citing the scheme in arguing against the need for a waiver.

The Capitalists who created the problem of inaccessibility of vaccines, the patents, are themselves providing the solution. But the solution is not removing patents, it is COVAX.

Because the problem creators are showing the supposed solution. They ensure that it never works.

Donald Trump refused to participate in Covax. Joe Biden joined it but has for the most part deprioritized the organization. Canada and EU too are behaving the same way. They are shedding crocodile tears that India is not delivering its targeted doses to COVAX.

COVAX, like the bullying Big Pharma is keeping the terms of its deals confidential. Refusing to disclose their negotiated prices allows pharmaceutical companies to maintain an upper hand over governments in bilateral negotiations, leading to disparities.

As a result of its conciliatory approach to pharmaceutical monopolies, COVAX fails to address vaccine scarcity.

Vaccines in India:

Just as the imperialist powers have influenced all the policies in India, they are also controlling the Covid vaccine policy. Indian manufacturers offered vaccines at cheaper rates, the capitalists who acquired billions of doses of vaccines to sell at exorbitant price felt this as a threat to their super profits. They managed to stop export of the vaccine raw material from US and Germany. Poonawala, the CEO of Serum Institute of India initially stated that with the present price also they get enough profits but later quoted different prices to Center and States and then escaped to UK from where he is quoting even higher prices. Bharat Biotech also followed suit in increasing the prices. The availability of vaccine raw materials only after the increase of prices show the clout of US, UK & German BigPharma like Pfizer, J&J, Modera over our national policies. By continuing our enmity with China, the imperialists are able to deny the possibility of importing from China various medical devices and vaccine raw material at the lowest possible prices. Even though vaccines from China are available at cheaper rates our governments are not in a position to import from it; to approve Russian vaccine quickly. The government has promised that all vaccines will be provided by center but later back tracked and led the States to go for International bidding. It is easy to tell whose direct and indirect influence led to these changes. The deaths of thousands of people due to delays in vaccine deliveries are small things in the competition between multinational companies for markets. The BigPharma company Sanofi, which has bought a majority stake in Santa biotech, a company with a long experience vaccine manufacturing, was able to move the vaccine manufacturing process out of India to keep high prices over vaccines. Thus, the future of the multi-billion-dollar vaccine business is well underway in the time of crisis.

Conclusion:

The spread of Covid around the world is what many call 'plandemic', because it was intentionally allowed to become a pandemic. The world capitalist system is constantly looking at ways and means to escape from its natural crisis. Until now it ensured that the military budgets of the countries be increased to 40-50 percent of the GDPs of the respective countries; Through World Bank the Capitalist system kept pressurising Governments to cut spending on education and medicine; ensured public health systems are at the brink of collapse in the respective countries and forcing families to pay on their own for all their health needs.

Once public health has been monopolized by corporate medical companies, insurance companies and Big Pharma companies, governments are inevitably dictated by them over Vaccine budgets looting Billions of dollars. To rejuvenate the sluggish production and consumption, created by the pervasive capitalist crisis, in all possible areas, the capitalist system has used this pandemic and created an inevitable situation for families to spend all that they have saved for their future, to survive now; mitigating the crisis in some sectors with the super profits in others. This brought a change only in the order of Forbes Billionaires list at the national and international level. For now, owners of vaccine and pharma companies are moving up the ladder. while lakhs of people are continuously pulled into poverty due to their illness, this 'plandemic' has so designed covid to add crores of people into the army of the poor. The solution is establishment of a new democratic system that can guarantee education, medicine, social security and abolish exploitative policies.