

Before it begins, COVID-19 vaccination in Turkey already a fiasco

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Even before its vaccination campaign has begun, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government and its murderous "herd immunity" policy are leading to a fiasco.

It was previously announced that vaccination would begin at the end of December, and that 20 million doses of vaccine would be available by the end of January. Health Minister Fahrettin Koca stated on January 7 that the government had made a definitive agreement for "50 million doses of inactivated vaccine" for a country of 83 million. He added that only a "first part of 3 million doses was delivered to the warehouses."

After a cabinet meeting Monday, President Erdoğan declared that vaccinations would start on Thursday or Friday, but did not give any explanation why vaccination had not started yet.

Three million Sinovac vaccine doses, coming from China, have already arrived and will be Turkey's main vaccine supply. As the WSWs recently pointed out, "Initial findings in a small study in Turkey show an effectiveness of 91.25 percent after a trial of 7,000 volunteers, and 78 percent in Brazil from a trial of 12,000." On Monday, Indonesian officials announced 65 percent effectiveness for Sinovac trials in that country.

Minister Koca also said on January 8, "We held a meeting again today for a mRNA-based vaccine and reviewed the new supply plan. We have signed a deal for 4.5 million doses of guarantee and up to 30 million doses." While it is believed that the mRNA-based vaccine in question is that of Pfizer/BioNTech, he did not state when the vaccine is to be delivered. Turkey has not made any deal with other vaccine producers whose products have been already started to use in many countries.

Thus, while Turkey needs about 160 million doses, it

has ordered only 80 million. As of now, just three million doses have been supplied, and a mass vaccination process has not begun yet. Moreover, in the statements made by top government officials, there is no certain information when, how many doses, and for whom the vaccine will be available in Turkey.

Under these conditions, the vaccination of a pro-government singer named Alişan in a live broadcast caused great anger on social media. Professor Çahan Kızıllı, who works in the German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases, tweeted: "In which 'priority' group is this person with a microphone in hand, while healthcare workers and those over 65 are not fully vaccinated yet? Which vaccine did he have?"

With the pandemic still out of control, as all over the world, experts and scientists in Turkey warn that COVID-19 will continue to be a danger for a long time. It is necessary to take full lockdown measures with full compensations to avert tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths before the vaccinations can take effect.

It is increasingly apparent that the announcement of an early launch of the vaccination campaign was made to provide justifications for relaxing or eliminating outright the limited restriction or lock-down measures taken in Turkey. The banks and the government would like to remove all such restrictions and reopen schools on February 15, as the semester begins, to force parents back to work.

Despite a dip in official figures following the lock-down measures, infections and deaths remain at an appallingly high level in Turkey. The daily number of cases has fallen to around 10,000 in recent days, down from 30,000. The official daily death toll also fell from a record 259 on December 23 to around 180.

To be blunt, however, there is no reason to trust

figures from the now-discredited Health Ministry. Until recently, it refused to give accurate pandemic data, making an arbitrary, unscientific distinction between “cases” and “patients” to avoid reporting asymptomatic or lightly symptomatic cases as COVID-19 infections. Growing popular anger at this cover-up forced the state to announce a figure it claimed represented total cases starting in November.

The research team at London-based TotalAnalysis, which has been monitoring official COVID-19 data from over 200 countries since the outbreak of the pandemic, published the Covid Data Transparency Index (CDTI). On this Index Turkey is ranked 97th of 100 countries, after Serbia, Turkmenistan and North Korea.

It stated that “despite recent improvements, Turkey’s data does not correspond to international standards so it is difficult for the general public to draw meaningful comparisons—for example, the table includes a daily ‘rate of pneumonia in patients’ but excludes global ratios such as positivity and fatality rates.”

With the priority of governments internationally concentrated on saving profits, not human lives, vaccine roll-outs are marred by chaos and incompetence all over. As the WSWS stated before, “As the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread out of control throughout the European continent, the program of vaccination organized by the European Union is already widely recognized to be a debacle.”

As of January 5, France has vaccinated only 5,000; Italy, 260,000; Spain, 139,000; and Denmark, 63,000. The situation is similar in the United States, where the vaccine roll-out is mired in delays. In Turkey itself, to cover up the failed response to the pandemic and vaccination policies and to divert the mounting public anger, the Turkish ruling class and government are mounting a phony, nationalist media campaign on the vaccine.

Prof. Dr. Uğur Şahin and Dr. Özlem Türeci, the founders of German firm BioNTech, are regularly hailed as a Turkish success story in the media. Şahin and Türeci first were placed on the cover of *Der Spiegel* and then *Time* magazine. Şahin, who is the CEO of BioNTech and a Turkish national, has made a quick entrance onto the Forbes’ list of billionaires. With a net wealth of \$4.2 billion, he is a leading German billionaire.

The billionaires’ pandemic profiteering is the other side of a vaccine fiasco that is seeing hundreds of thousands dying preventable deaths while vaccine roll-outs stagnate.

This is creating broad anger in the working class and on social media, where Boston College biology Professor Emrah Altınđı recalled the precedent of Jonas Salk, who consciously decided not to patent his vaccine for polio and stated: “the patent of this vaccine belongs to humanity. Could you patent the sun?” Altınđı added: “Billions of people will not be able to reach this Pfizer vaccine with 95 percent protection due to a) the company’s production capacity limit b) patent rights and c) the cost of the vaccine.”

The article “Pandemic profiteers: Forbes adds 50 health care moguls to its list of global billionaires,” shared under these comments on Twitter, received a powerful response, because the only article exposing these profiteers in Turkish was written by the WSWS.

It is urgent for the working class to mobilize and impose measures to contain the pandemic before millions more die for the sake of capitalist profit. This requires the use of science for the benefit of humanity, not for private profit. For this, the international working class must be mobilized to transform the pharmaceutical giants and every major industry sector into publicly-owned and democratically-controlled utilities to serve social needs, as part of a struggle for socialism.



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