

VACCINES FIASCO

The case for a committee of inquiry



Background

It's been a year since the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in the EU. Many lives have been lost since then, livelihoods destroyed, and most have struggled in different ways to deal with the challenges of the pandemic in daily life. Poverty and inequality are still on the rise.

Back during the first wave of the pandemic, frontline workers responded to address public needs and received daily applause, €7.6 billion was pumped into research worldwide and European Commission President von der Leyen spoke of developing vaccines as a 'global public good'.

Then the vaccines emerged. Governments would be able to finally come to terms with the crisis, save lives, open up societies and the economy, allow us all to get back to some kind of 'normal'. The stakes, and hopes, could hardly have been higher.

But as big pharma market values soared on the back of these developments, they were given more and more public money. AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK, Johnson and Johnson, BioNTech-Pfizer, CureVac, and Moderna became household names and declared record profits to the tune of hundreds of billions of euros. It quickly became clear that the public interest was taking a back seat to private profit.



All apologies...

From the outset, concerns about the Commission's vaccines strategy were raised. They refused to release the full contracts signed with Big Pharma, refused to lift patents, and released companies from liability arising from supply delays or safety issues.

Delays in the rollout of vaccines then led to public anger and a damaging blame game between countries, the pharma companies, and EU institutions. In late January, von der Leyen had to apologise publicly for "mistakes" made. Serious doubts were being cast over the Commission's control over the situation with the institution at loggerheads with companies over massive shortfalls in supplies.

But von der Leyen's admission that errors were committed in the rollout of vaccines has not allayed widespread popular anger at the EU's botched strategy. Big Pharma looks firmly in the driving seat, the Commission at sea, and ordinary people paying the price.



Accountability, answers, respect!

The Left welcomed the creation of the Covid-19 Contact Group between the European Commission and Parliament as a small step in the right direction. However, we need to go much further to deal with the many open questions on alleged violations and maladministration in the application of EU law in the processes concerning the research, development, negotiations, distribution and roll-out of the vaccines.

In short, we need accountability. That's why we're calling on all political groups in the Parliament to support our demand to establish a committee of inquiry to get to the bottom of how this shambles came about and to hold those responsible to account.

The need for answers to some major questions gets more urgent by the day. A committee of inquiry would investigate failures on transparency in negotiating the Advance Purchase Agreements (APAs) and contracts. It would enable MEPs to examine the deals done on reasonable liability and indemnification clauses in the APAs and to give clarity on these provisions. It would provide the public and media with the chance to uncover the political choices made by the Commission on our behalf with regard to global access to vaccines, compulsory licences and intellectual property rights. Did they act in the public interest? If not, why not?

If accepted, our proposal would establish this committee immediately with its 30 members tasked with presenting an interim report within six months of starting work and a final verdict within a year.



What our MEPs say



This sad state of affairs has left us with no other option but to work towards the establishment of a European Parliament Committee of Inquiry to hold those responsible for the vaccines fiasco to account and force through a change in approach.

Martin Schirdewan



What is happening with the vaccines and the overall Commission response to the social emergency is a scandal. This is why we demand the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate and hold accountable those responsible.

Manon Aubry

Read more!

[Click here to read our full draft mandate to set up a committee of inquiry here.](#)