

EDITORS' NOTE

September of this year marked the 37th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on Primary Health Care (PHC), one of the most important documents in the history of international public health. From September 6-12, 1978, over 3,000 delegates from various countries came together for a conference organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in Alma-Ata, a city in the former Soviet Union, to discuss and approve the PHC, which subsequently became a public health icon.

In later years, different agencies defended the principles of PHC. Some recent examples include the WHO and its annual report of 2008, entitled "Primary Health Care – Now More Than Ever." The Universal Health Coverage proposal promoted over the last ten years by leaders at the World Bank and other agencies is inspired by the PHC, according to its supporters. In both the WHO report and this proposal, PHC is associated with a modernization of primary care, the assignation of more healthcare resources to rural and deprived urban areas, the recruiting of community healthcare agents, universal access to basic health services and greater emphasis on disease prevention (which generally receives less attention in national Health Ministry budgets than treatment for patients). It is true that the PHC of 1978 advocated all of this. But that was not all it stood for. It had transformational political implications that faded in the conservative, neoliberal context which dominated from the 1980s on.

Some international healthcare documents defended and revitalized the original political significance of the PHC. The most well-known ones are the Ottawa Charter, approved in 1986 in the first International Conference on Health Promotion, and the publications produced from 2005-2008 by the Commission on Social Determinants of Health. These documents suggested and, on occasion, openly proposed that PHC should be the center of a program for socially inclusive development in developing countries and a tool for creating more egalitarian and caring societies in industrialized countries. They also suggested that healthcare workers could become agents of change and social progress, articulating – along with union leaders, community leaders and progressive non-governmental organizations – demands and solutions for resolving social injustice, discrimination and poverty. For defenders of this holistic version, PHC could not be left up to technocratic policy within a model of society being promoted by neoliberal policies; namely, a society with less state government and fewer social services, where public health care for the neediest members of society functioned as a palliative for dire poverty. By contrast, they saw PHC as part of a reform or even a social

revolution. However, there was never, unfortunately, any explicit, meaningful discussion about the political dimension of PHC, and that discussion has yet to happen. Could this debate take place in the next few years? Let us hope so. Funding cuts to healthcare systems in wealthy, middle-income and poor countries, and the protests these have sparked, lead us to hope that the more progressive, less technocratic version of PHC will make some headway.

Speaking of cutbacks, we cannot fail to mention in this letter our deep concern and vehement objections to the drastic funding cuts to Brazilian journals traditionally supported by federal agencies such as CNPq (the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development). This is an unprecedented cut, which will force journals to curtail their growth and modernization and detract from the national and international visibility we have been achieving. Despite these difficulties, *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos* is continuing to increase its international profile. Recently, the Comité Científico Asesor del Sistema de Información Científica Redalyc (Scientific Committee to Evaluate the Redalyc Scientific Information System) – an important network for scientific journals in Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal which is based in Mexico (<http://www.redalyc.org/>) – informed us that our journal will be included in that valuable database. The British Academy has also approved a proposal by this journal, in collaboration with the *Journal of Latin American Studies*, to investigate twenty-first century challenges to academic journals in history, human sciences and social sciences. As part of that program, we are getting ready to hold a workshop for editors and members of editorial boards on British, Brazilian and other Latin American journals, in the middle of next year (it will be announced shortly on the journal's blog and Facebook page). It is important to mention that this project would not have been successful without the valuable contribution of Paulo Drinot, the coeditor of the *Journal of Latin American Studies* and associate editor of this journal.

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