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By Princess Harmony

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## ***Big Pharma's crime: profits from addiction***

New Hampshire's attorney general, John Formella, has launched a lawsuit against Walmart, Walgreens, CVS, RiteAid and other pharmacies for failing to track opioid prescriptions and for failing to take action against possibly unnecessary, fraudulent or otherwise excessive opioid prescribing. Pharmacy managements have concealed the failure to track the prescriptions, compounding these crimes against the working class.

Many thousands of people have become addicted to opioid painkillers. Many more have died of overdoses due to using opioids like fentanyl and its analogues — furanylfentanyl, ohmefentanyl, acetylfentanyl, carfentanil — when they could no longer get their legally prescribed painkillers.



In the era of COVID-19, addiction to opioids has increased, and so have deaths from opioids. In 2020, 92,000 lives were lost to opioids, and many more have been wrecked due to them. (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

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Painkiller producers such as Purdue Pharma — the maker of OxyContin (oxycodone) — are one major source of the opioid and overdose epidemics. These companies knowingly and deliberately lied about the addictive nature of their painkillers. The doctors who prescribed the companies' drugs received kickbacks and rewards for their ability to push the most painkillers. ("Purdue Pharma guilty in opioid deaths," Workers World, Oct. 26, 2020)

Chain pharmacies should have tracked overprescriptions and reported suspicious or excessive prescriptions to authorities to investigate. This did not happen. Instead, as Attorney General Formella said, the pharmacies acted as "the last link" in the opioid supply chain.

### **Lawsuits against 'pusher' pharmacies and companies**

New Hampshire isn't the only state to file lawsuits against pharmacies. Two counties in the state of Ohio have previously launched lawsuits against Walgreens, Walmart and CVS. Those lawsuits were successful, though another legal proceeding will determine what damages will have to be paid.

CVS, Walgreens and Walmart rejected the decision, claiming that it wasn't "their fault." Given results of other opioid lawsuits, it is a possibility that the three pharmaceutical giants and their owners will get off for their crimes against the proletariat.

For example, the Sackler family — owners of Purdue Pharma and founders of Mundipharma — was given immunity in their New York bankruptcy trial, despite the fact that overprescription of OxyContin was to their economic advantage.

Activists — including former opioid addicts — protested granting immunity to the Sacklers and their agents. The Department of Justice and several other state attorneys general protested the decision, saying that people who were harmed by the overprescription of OxyContin and other opioid painkillers had the right to sue the people responsible for their suffering.

Whether opioid makers — Purdue Pharma, Teva Pharmaceuticals, Johnson & Johnson and others — or opioid distributors — Walmart, Walgreens, CVS, Rite Aid and others — the chain of the opioid flow can be traced through all of them.

## **Who gets scapegoated for drug use?**

Poor Black and Brown people, along with poor white people, are labeled as the root cause of the opioid crisis, because some of them have had to turn to low-level drug dealing to survive. But these are not the people who created the crisis — far from it. The bourgeoisie of drug makers and distributors and the petty bourgeoisie of doctors and pharmacists are the creators of the opioid crisis.

People who became addicted did not receive billions in profits from opioid sales, nor did they receive kickbacks and rewards for prescribing drugs. But poor workers of all nationalities were mocked and jailed as low-down people who were addicted to the pills.

The “War on Drugs” is a lie. If the War on Drugs was truly a war against drugs, the Sacklers of Purdue Pharma, the corporate managers of Teva Pharmaceuticals, the Waltons who own Walmart, the owners and executive managers of CVS and many others would be in handcuffs and in jail. They would be forced to turn their blood-money profits over to the people. They would get their just punishment for killing and addicting so many.

Instead, the “War on Drugs” continues to attack Black, Brown and poor white people as if they’re the ones responsible. They are still arrested and held in the prison systems, punished for low-level “crimes” wealthier people get away with, and labor for pennies or for nothing with no chance at meaningful job training.

The drug war against people continues. It is our job to hold the feet of judges and district attorneys to the fire, to make them punish the true culprits of the opioid and overdose epidemics: drug maker companies and drug distributor pharmacies.

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