Dissecting slander and crying for justice: Carlos Chagas and the Nobel Prize of 1921

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Abstract

Chagas disease was discovered by Carlos Chagas in 1909. Chagas worked at Oswaldo Cruz Institute, where the bases of experimental medicine were settled in Brazil, and that had no connection with the Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro. Chagas had several enemies at Oswaldo Cruz Institute mainly because of his election to Head of Service in 1910, and for the position of Oswaldo Cruz Directorship in 1917. Furthermore, Chagas gained enemies at Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro, which did not like to see the economical political autonomy of Oswaldo Cruz Institute. This allowed the Institute not only to perform top experimental research, but also to take the leadership of research in the country.

Chagas was nominated to the Nobel Prize of 1921 in December, 1920. None was awarded the Nobel Prize in that year. He seems to have been evaluated by the Noble Committee of Karolinska Institute from March to May of 1921. At that time, his enemies were denying his discovery of *Trypanosoma cruzi*, a key point in Chagas' nomination by Karolinska Institute, and giving no epidemiological importance for the disease. By the same way, the obligation of small pox vaccination was tarnishing his public image. Having taken into account the epidemiologic importance of Chagas disease, the strong historical mistake in the process of Chagas evaluation, and the inequity behind all these facts, we insist on a posthumous Nobel Prize for the man who made the most complete medical-scientist discovery of all time.

Keywords:

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When a misperception favors a tragedy: Carlos Chagas and the Nobel Prize of 1921

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Abstract

Carlos Chagas, the discoverer of Chagas' disease was nominated to the Nobel Prize in 1921, but none did win the prize in that year. As a leader of a young scientist team, he discovered all aspects of the new disease from 1909 to 1920. It is still obscure why he did not win the Nobel Prize in 1921.

Chagas was discarded by Gunnar Hedrèn on April 16, 1921. Hedrèn should have made a written report about the details of his evaluation to the Nobel Committee. However, such a document has not been found in the Nobel Committee Archives. No evidence of detractions made by Brazilian scientists on Chagas was found. Since Chagas nomination was consistent with the Nobel Committee requirements, as seen in the presentation letter by until now unknown Cypriano de Freitas, it become clear that Chagas did not win the Nobel Prize exclusively because the Nobel Committee did not perceive the importance of his discovery.

Thus, it would be fair a posthumous Nobel Prize of 1921 to Carlos Chagas. A diploma of the Nobel Prize, as precedent with Dogmack in 1947, would recognize the merit of the scientist who made the most complete medical discovery of all times.

Keywords:

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