

France summons Chinese ambassador after embassy criticizes “herd immunity” policy

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French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called in Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye Monday to criticize his embassy’s statements defending China’s record in the COVID-19 pandemic.

This diplomatic incident centered on the contrast between China, where the pandemic is in check for now, with the few dozen daily new cases mostly imported from abroad, and Europe. COVID-19 is killing thousands each day in France and in Europe, where governments are calling for an end to shelter-at-home policies, pushing a frightened population back to work. At the same time, an anticommunist campaign is spreading in the French media to blame China, the original epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the disaster unfolding in Europe.

On Sunday, an anonymous Chinese diplomat posted a long note in French on the embassy web site, criticizing the European ruling elites. “China’s victory over the epidemic makes them bitter. With their concocted arguments, claiming that China ‘delayed its reaction’ and ‘hid the truth,’ they present China as principally responsible for the pandemic. ... At the same time, in the West, we saw politicians tearing each other apart for votes, calling for herd immunity, which meant abandoning their citizens to face the viral onslaught alone, and stealing shipments of medicine from each other.”

France’s Foreign Ministry reacted with a communiqué stating, “Certain public positions taken by representatives of the Chinese embassy in France do not conform to the quality of the bilateral relations between our two countries.” It also said Le Drian would communicate to the ambassador his “disapproval” of “certain recent comments” of the Chinese embassy on COVID-19.

If the note upset Paris, this is because it explodes lies the European powers tell workers at home about COVID-19. Vast death tolls in Europe were not inevitable. Nor is “herd immunity”—that is, making a majority of the population get COVID-19 and, if it survives, perhaps become immune to the virus—the only strategy to fight the illness. These were lies to justify keeping workers at work in unsafe jobs, pumping out profits for the banks but also spreading the

virus.

Responsibility for COVID-19’s spread in America and Europe lies not with China, but with capitalism. Of course, China’s Stalinist dictatorship itself oversees a capitalist society: it restored capitalism in 1989 as it opened China to the world economy, massacring workers and students protesting on Tiananmen Square against the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) policies. However, surviving elements of rudimentary state economic planning, mass quarantines and the mobilization of industry allowed for a far more effective response to COVID-19 in China than in Europe.

The coherent, democratic adoption of such policies internationally, which is key to fight COVID-19, requires a world revolution by the working class, including in China, to transition to socialism. Reading the French capitalist media’s frenzied attacks on China, in which anticommunism is intertwined with appeals to anti-Chinese racism, it is obvious that the main force motivating this campaign is precisely the bourgeoisie’s fear of socialism and revolution.

Commentator and former army officer Renaud Girard—who began his journalistic career reporting from Rwanda in 1994 for *Le Figaro*, as France backed the Rwandan Hutu regime’s bloody genocide of the Tutsis—proclaims that COVID-19 is proof of the failure of Marxism and communism. The pandemic, he wrote, “has unveiled the bankruptcy of three ideologies: communism, Europism and globalism. The Chinese Communist Party bears the heaviest responsibility for the birth and the initial dissemination of this highly contagious disease.”

“China bears heavy responsibility for this epidemic transmitted by a wild animal in which trading is banned,” *Le Monde* wrote, in a column blaming the global pandemic on Chinese who ate pangolin, an animal through which coronavirus may have migrated from bats to humans. In a post bearing a large communist hammer-and-sickle emblem, the newspaper hypocritically observed: “The Chinese dictatorship censors the media, the public does not know how many people are ill.”

Isabelle Lasserre, a reporter for the right-wing *Le* who apes Donald Trump with claims that “China pulls the strings of the World Health Organization (WHO),” insisted that COVID-19 proves Western capitalist democracy to be superior to the Chinese dictatorship: “While dictatorships were destabilized by the unexpected, democracies reacted calmly, transparently, rationally. They could anticipate and explain. Their open and coordinated health systems reacted rapidly... The democracies have proven that their system is the most effective.”

Claims that the European regimes are most effective at fighting the virus expose only the European bourgeoisie’s contempt for human life. China, COVID-19’s original epicenter, has seen 82,295 cases and 3,342 deaths. Europe, however, has at least 935,338 cases and 74,662 deaths. Moreover, while the WHO independently confirmed China’s COVID-19 statistics, thousands are dying unreported at home or in retirement homes in Europe, and European officials admit that the number of COVID-19 cases in Europe may be two to ten times higher than the stated figure.

The anti-China campaign’s enthusiasm for the mass deaths in Europe reflects the class brutality of the financial aristocracy’s “herd immunity” policy. For them, the working class is a herd to be culled. The early death of tens or hundreds of thousands mean that billions of euros that, from their standpoint, would have been wasted on health and pension spending on these individuals can be redirected to stock markets and the wealth of super-rich parasites.

Attempts to foist responsibility for the resulting COVID-19 deaths on the CCP are political lies. They were refuted by the note posted Sunday by Chinese embassy officials in Paris, which made clear that China gave ample warning to let Europe prepare for COVID-19.

This book compiles the most critical programmatic statements, polemics, scientific analyses, interviews, and news articles published by the World Socialist Web Site on the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a social and political chronology of this world historic event based on a Marxist and Trotskyist perspective.

The note observes, “As early as December 30 of last year, we were publicly reporting cases of unknown pneumonia. Starting on January 3, we regularly informed the WHO and the entire world on the progression of the disease and, in record time, we succeeded in identifying the disease agent. On January 11, we shared with the WHO the entire sequencing of the genome of the virus. On January 23, as Wuhan went into lockdown, over 800 people were contaminated, and only 9 of them were abroad. And it was over a month later that the epidemic began in Europe and the United States.”

No one has tried to refute these claims, which are borne out by publicly available reports in global media. It is also a matter of public record that European governments reacted by downplaying the seriousness of COVID-19, comparing it to seasonal flu, opposing social distancing measures, and demanding that workers stay at work.

The note unfavorably contrasts European and Chinese policy: “China did not hold back from cutting trillions of yuans from its Gross Domestic Product, injecting hundreds of billions of yuans into health resources, and mobilizing over 40,000 health care workers from all across the country to go support Wuhan and Hubei province, finally defeating the epidemic in only two months.”

With vast financial resources and developed economies, however, the European ruling class rejected these policies, instead demanding massive bank bailouts. Referring caustically to “certain Western political and cultural elites,” the note adds: “[T]he fact that Western countries underestimated the seriousness of the virus and were late in taking ad hoc measures, making the epidemic uncontrollable, does not trouble their conscience or keep them awake at nights.”

The fatal contradiction in the CCP’s Stalinist strategy is that its export-led integration into the world economy requires cutting commercial and political deals with US and European capital, whose barbarism the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, to furnish them with Chinese workers as cheap labor.

The growing anger, protests and strikes among workers in Europe and internationally go in another political direction: a unified struggle of the working class internationally to expropriate the fortunes of the super-rich and use these resources to halt the global pandemic.



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