

COVID-19 outbreak worsens in Taiwan amid vaccine row

Jerry Zhang**23 June 2021**

As the COVID-19 disaster resurges on a global scale, Taiwan's pandemic continues to grow, with more than 100 new cases every day for a month. In the data released on June 20, another 11 deaths were recorded and 109 confirmed infections were added.

In a bid to downplay the crisis, the Taipei City government decided to end daily reports on pandemic data, causing popular concern. Mayor Ko Wen-Je announced that future reports will be "elastically organised."

Responding to reporters' questions, Ko Wen-Je said "the daily report data is meaningless." He claimed that Taiwan's Center for Disease Control (CDC) would publish the number of diagnosed people every day, but the CDC reports often differ from the Taipei City data.

Ko Wen-Je's statement exposed a fact: Taiwan's pandemic emergency has been underway for more than a month, but the central and local governments have failed to provide a regular, synchronized way to report the data.

Taiwan's government is trying to make people believe that "the epidemic has tended to stabilize, and everything is under control," but the outbreak has exposed its boasts of being a "model of epidemic prevention."

On May 27, the Taipei Doctors Union said in a Facebook post that with the deteriorating situation in Taipei, the medical system is highly stressed, with medical equipment and professionals extremely lacking.

On May 28, Singapore-based doctor Lim Wooi Tee, an epidemic prevention specialist, appeared on the Taiwanese talk show "50 Era Money" to call for a total lockdown on the island.

Nevertheless, the Taiwanese government has refused to raise lockdown measures to the highest stage. Instead

it has extended third-stage measures to the end of June. Taiwan's ruling elites and media have referred to a "Stay At Home" policy, but have ignored the difficulties suffered by the working class.

According to reports, 445 companies have imposed unpaid leave programs, and at least 4,125 workers have been furloughed without pay, while other workers have had their salaries slashed.

At the same time, the Taiwan Labour Department announced that logistics companies can invoke "disaster or emergency" provisions, requiring workers to do overtime and cancel rest days. Logistics companies can force employees to work more than 12 hours a day, and monthly overtime can exceed the previous 46-hour limit.

This high-intensity work, combined with a lack of protection, is fuelling anger over the use of the crisis to intensify the exploitation of workers.

Employees of many electronic equipment and semiconductor manufacturing plants located in the Hsinchu and Miaoli areas have been compelled to stay at their jobs, directly exposing them to the risk of infection. Many factories began to report large-scale infection clusters from the beginning of June. In the first half of the month, a total of 448 migrant workers in these factories have been infected, along with nearly 100 local workers.

The fact that so many migrant workers have been infected has exposed their poor working conditions and living environment. According to reports, their housing is very crowded and sanitary conditions are terrible. The Labour Department suggested that migrant workers' agencies quarantine workers with "one person, one room," but the agencies said this was impossible, or would be too costly, because their dormitories usually have 8 to 12 workers per room, or

even more.

After the outbreaks, these factories did not immediately shut down, but only partially suspended production. Infections were reportedly brought under control in recent days, and Taiwanese media outlets have begun to promote bright prospects of rising orders for these factories in the second half of the year.

In addition to the big business-driven chaos of the government's response to the pandemic, the island's vaccine supply has been subordinated to the drive by the Biden administration in the United States to use Taiwan as a tool to confront Beijing.

The Taiwanese authorities rejected Beijing's proposal for vaccine assistance a month ago, then immediately turned to the US and Japan for vaccines. On June 20, some 2.5 million doses of vaccine donated by the US government arrived, three times the amount previously promised.

President Tsai Ing-wen quickly thanked President Biden through Facebook, writing: "A friend in need is a friend indeed, the United States is a true friend of Taiwan."

Japan, which occupied the island from 1895 to 1945, also stated recently that it would continue to provide assistance to Taiwan.

In response, Beijing and the media under its control has conducted a propaganda war on the "Taiwan vaccine safety issue," directed against the AstraZeneca vaccine being used. Mirroring the attacks on Chinese vaccines carried out by the Western media, the Chinese media have exaggerated the side effects and health risks of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The pandemic in Taiwan shows that the capitalist government, like others around the world, has chosen to sacrifice the poor and the working class, and prioritize the profits of large enterprises. At the same time, the official response to the pandemic has been subjected to the agenda of the US and its allies in stepping up their offensive against China.



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